

# TEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

## THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

SOME BASIC PERSPECTIVES OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

— *George Punchekunnel*

SPIRITUALITY, YESTERDAY AND TODAY

— *F. B. Connolly*

THE EXPERIENCE OF PRAYER

— *Samuel Rayan*

THE BIBLE AS SOURCE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

— *C. M. Cherian*

TOWARDS A MORE RELEVANT SPIRITUALITY

— *George Puthumana*

BASIC TRENDS IN MODERN SPIRITUALITY

— *Swami Siddhinathananda*

BULLETIN: A DIALOGUE ON MEDITATION

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# JEEVADHARA

— A Journal of Christian Interpretation —



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# The Fullness of Life

## THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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# Editorial

The sixth section of JEEVADHARA is entitled "The Fullness of Life". Its area of study comprises pastoral, moral, liturgical and spiritual theology. Without attempting to create any precedent for future issues of this section, in the present issue we have limited ourselves to the field of spiritual theology. The current issue studies the theme 'The Spiritual Life' in a general way, without descending to particular problems.

In the first article George Punchekunnel examines the basic ingredients of authentic Christian spirituality in the light of the insights of Vatican II. In his historical study, *Spirituality, Yesterday and Today*, Finbar Connolly institutes a comparison between traditional spirituality and modern spirituality. He applies the term 'traditional' to the period after the Reformation with special emphasis on the 19th century; 'Modern', for him is the 20th century with stress laid on the period of the Biblical and liturgical renewal culminating in Vatican II. Samuel Rayan's *Experience of Prayer* is an analysis of one of the central realities of the spiritual life: prayer. Without using the traditional terminology he reflects rather, on some of the incidents recorded in the Gospels. C. M. Cherian establishes that the fundamental source and norm of Christian life have to be God's revealed Word, a truth which has been neglected in the Catholic Church for centuries with sad consequences. George Puthumana throws light on the present-day spiritual crisis and gives the lines along which a solution is being worked out in contemporary spiritual thinking.

Any study of Christian spirituality in the Indian context will not be complete if we do not take into account the rich spiritual heritage of our Hindu rsis and seekers of God. Christian spirituality, we think, has much to gain by contact with Hindu spirituality. Moreover, a meaningful dialogue with



Hinduism can begin only from the plane of spirituality. Swāmi Siddhināthānanda's article in this issue is to be viewed in this light. In it he indicates the basic trends in modern Hindu spirituality with special reference to the contribution made by Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa and Swāmi Vivēkānanda. We are happy to publish in this issue a report of a successful inter-faith experience — dialogue on meditation — held at the Kāśī Vidya Pīth, in December 1970, in which about 25 people belonging to different Hindu and Christian persuasions took part.

Spirituality is not of a fashionable subject among many Catholics today, even among some of the clergy and the religious. It seems good enough only for old folk and children! One of the reasons for this is the mistake we make of identifying spirituality with a set of religious practices which do not appear to be relevant to the daily life of people or to affect it. In fact, authentic spirituality has little to do with what is popularly called religiosity or piety. The problem points to a serious lacuna in Christian formation. Man has grown enormously in the knowledge of the universe. He has fathomed even the mysteries of the once unreachable outer space. But he remains a child in his knowledge of God, of his relationship with Him and the consequences these have on his life and his dealings with his fellowmen. For man's integral growth a maturer spirituality is essential. Childlikeness demanded by the Gospels as a condition for entry into the kingdom of God is not the same thing as infantilism. We do not claim that these pages portray the picture of a mature Christian spirituality; at least an attempt has been made to provide an outline.

Christ Hall,  
Calicut.

Joseph Thayil



# Some Basic Perspectives of Christian Spirituality

Spiritual life is man's life with God. It is not merely the spirit of man that lives with God. Man is not only a spirit, nor is he a soul imprisoned in a body owing to some misfortune. The whole of man, as he is, has come from the heart of God according to His original and eternal design. Man has to live in fellowship with God, with all that he is and all that he has. He has "to love God with his whole heart, whole soul, whole mind, and whole strength" (Lk 10: 27). All the same this is called spiritual life because it is through his spirit that man comes into contact with God who is a Spirit, pure and simple. The whole of man, along with the universe of which he is a part, is brought into God, and is made to live with Him through his spirit, his soul.

In this article we are attempting to present an integrated vision of Christian spirituality availing ourselves of the new insights we are given through modern biblical studies and the current theological speculations remarkably encouraged by Vatican II.

## 1. The Basic Constituents

In order to live with God one need not be taken out of one's body or this world. One has to live with God in one's life-context, made up of God first of all, and of all that is in and around one, such as one's spiritual and bodily nature, the men and women around one with their positive and negative traits, the animal and vegetable world, the world of matter in which one is involved, and contemporary culture and civilization with their scientific and technical progress. All things, all events, in and around a person, have a purpose and a specific role to play in his life with God. They are there because He saw them to be good (Gen. 1:22), and useful and necessary for man.

*God.* In order that a man may live with God, God should be, in fact, the supreme reality for him. To this end he should believe in God rather than try to conceive him. 'The just man lives through faith' (Rom. 1:17). The real God cannot be conceived, as whatever man conceives is proportionate to his limited nature. It will always be the infinite reflected in the finite and necessarily reduced to the finite. All the concepts man forms are 'conceived' and brought forth by the tiny little creature that he is, and are invariably similar to him. All our representations and descriptions of God are necessarily inadequate; He always remains the ineffable and inconceivable. But He is not unreal for that reason. He is the really real, and the most profoundly real compared to the transient realities that we come across around us. He is the reality beyond and beneath all realities.

God is to be contemplated rather than conceived. He is the All, to be approached with the whole of our being. Faith is an act of basic openness of the whole of our being to the whole of Being that God is. The vision of faith is the profoundest one, deeper, more comprehensive, and more farreaching than all the means of knowledge that man has on earth. Through faith man welcomes God into himself, with all that He is. The inner opening of a man towards God through faith has to grow from an occasional act of more or less frequency to a continuing state of internal communion with God.

The God who Himself lives in the inner communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is the most basic constituent of our spiritual life. God who is "highest in us, and more intimate than what is most intimate to us" (St Augustine), is the immense reality in which all the other transient realities are rooted; and this Ground of all beings has to be grasped with the ground of our own being.

*Man.* Spiritual life is man's life with God. Unlike God man is not a pure spirit, though he is also a spirit like Him. Man is projected by God to the earth to live in a body of senses in existential communion with the world of animals, plants and 'inert' matter around him. His body and senses are the proper setting in which alone he can live and act. His most spiritual

actions, his acts of communion with God, in faith and love, are dependent on his bodily existence.

Man is also bound up with his fellowmen around him. His existence is essentially social. As there is no purely spiritual existence so also one cannot find a man who is an individual, pure and simple, and who is not rooted in, and vitally influenced by, society.

Man is to be conceived of as having, equally, a basic inclination towards God and love and a heritage of, and inclination for, sin and selfishness. Man is a sinner who is in the process of being redeemed, who is slowly being brought out from darkness to light and from death to life. The man of today is the progeny of a scientific and technological age, and therefore has explored, in his mind, many myths, which, however, he has replaced with a few new ones. He is actively bound up with an international community through the ever-present means of fast communication. He is the modern man with his frustrations and preoccupations, living in the midst of hectic activity, and trying to build a heaven on earth through horizontal readjustments.

*The World.* Man has to live with God in the world, the world of men and of things. He has been placed in the world by God, his loving Father, to find his way back to God as well as to live in the company of God. Man is saved not by being taken out of the world but by living in it, yet not being of it (Jn 17:14-16). Man is progressively being saved by living in and through the world. His vision of the world of men, ideas and things, and his attitude towards it, enter into the make-up of his life with God. Man cannot live with God by running away from the world but only by being and acting in it, with God and for God. The world is the medium through which God reveals Himself to us and acts in us and it is equally the medium of man's communication with God.



## 2. Their Modes of Action

God is active in the world for man, and man is active in the world for God. God's acting in the world is as old as the world itself. Man has been formed by God in such a way as to be able to recognize Him and respond to His acting. God acts in the world of things: in the material universe with its ceaseless and all-pervasive movement, in the vegetable and animal world with its constant growth and productivity. Everything is internally and ultimately activated in, and by, God. We can say that the world is throbbing with the activity of God. This activity in the world is relayed, amplified and brought within the range of man's perceptibility by the universe round him, in which he lives. Since it is God's activity, everything in the world is beneficent to man. We should never for a moment disbelieve or doubt the propriety of God's acting in the world. As God is the Master and Lord of all things, and holds and controls them from within, nothing can escape His vision and care. He is the Lord of history, who directs all events according to the purpose of His loving plans. He acts in the development of every religion, in the growth of every nation and in every form of scientific and technical progress.

He opened a new and special phase of action in and through Abraham by electing him the father of a people, a nation destined to be the chosen medium through which He would communicate Himself. He continued this special intervention in the history of mankind through the fathers and prophets, by palpably guiding the destinies of the Jews. Finally in the fullness of time, God himself took on flesh in this nation and thus established a very special bond with mankind. From the beginning God's acting in the world was always directed towards Christ; and thenceforth He is revealed, through Christ, who is the historical fountainhead of His eschatological activity in the world. In Christ God's communication of Himself becomes complete, in principle (cf. Rom. 8:32; Heb 1:1,2). Christ dwells among us full of grace and truth and of his fullness we all receive (Jn. 1:14, 16). His task is to give in and through himself, all that God has to share with man, and, by the same process, to gather up man in himself and bring him back to God so that God may be all in all (Cor. 15:28). God's intervention in human history is brought

up to the eschatological level in Christ, so that He may be all in all (Cor. 15:28). His intervention in human history, brought up to the eschatological level in Christ Jesus, is continued at present in the Spirit and through the Church.

Along with the ever-present saving activity of God in the world this special activity of His also continues now through Christ, through the Spirit, through the Church, through the revealed Word of God, especially the Bible, and through the sacraments. Man's task is to respond to all the kinds of God's activity, to the extent that he is awakened to them. Man being a creature who is sustained in existence by God, can do nothing of his own accord and all his activities are an act of co-operation with God acting in and through him. This should continue at all levels. All the positive and creative actions of man are 'coactions' with God. Without God man does nothing (cf. Jn 15:5), or he performs actions that have only a negative value.

Man should discern, at all levels, God as He acts in the world of men, things and events around him. He should be able to decipher the actions and reactions of the world and distinguish that which comes from God and that which takes place as a result of man's resistance to God. While cooperating with the former he has to dissociate himself from the latter. Man's law of action is action with God, and inaction without God.

### **3. The Achieving of Harmony**

To live with God in the real situation of men and the world is to strive incessantly to maintain and promote an inner attitude of peace and harmony. This interior harmony is possible only if one is in complete agreement with God, His plans, designs, arrangements and dispositions, in a word, His will. We do not aim precisely at the achieving of harmony as such, but at bringing ourselves into conformity with God in all the details and situations of our life.

This is possible only by willingly responding to God's action in us directly as well as through the men, things and

situations around us. Our conformity with God and the subsequent realisation of harmony ought not to be the result of merely observing the ten commandments or the wishes of our superiors, neither should it come from merely obeying the rules and regulations of the Church or of the particular groups to which we belong. It is all this and much more than this. God's wish and plan should be accepted through whatever medium or situation they might come to us, and we should be alive and responsive to God's action whatever form it takes. No word of the Lord should remain sterile in us (cf. Mt 5: 19). This basic openness to, and universal acceptance of, the will of God, which is His action in us through His Spirit, has often been neglected. There are many who restrict themselves to a few channels of God's action and that too on account of their social involvements and the repercussions of the actions of others, to the detriment of the total action of God. It is God and His disposition of events that matter, and not so much fidelity to a few created realities, which could degenerate into a form of idolatry. If it is with God that we have to live, we should be interiorly alive to Him always and everywhere irrespective of the means He chooses to communicate Himself to us.

During his earthly life, Christ, in his confrontation with the pharisees, pointed out that by doggedly adhering to a few prescriptions emanating from their own human traditions they were neglecting the overall plan of God and its basic demands (Mt 23: 23-24). In order to be a just man one has to take all justice into account. Harmony and peace are the result of complete justice.

For this purpose, discernment of the will of God, of the action of God, of the presence of His Spirit, is absolutely essential. Spiritual life should be lived on the lines of inner conformity rather than of mere outward conformism. We see in Christ Jesus our way and model, and he always did what pleased his Father (Jn 4: 34; 5: 30; 6: 38). He followed the Jewish way of life in every detail insofar as it did not go against the more basic demands of the will of God and contradict justice and mercy.



One should be able to read the signs of the times, discern the changing situation, replace anachronistic practices, adopt new ones and experiment in opening up new paths of action. The details of the will of God are not manifested once and for all. His action is not an accomplished fact in a historical and human situation, saving us the trouble of a diligent search for it. An active, prayerful, and concerted search for the will of God is a basic requisite for a harmonious life with God. The act of listening to our conscience, if this is understood in the correct sense, helps us to find out the will of God in a given situation.

Spiritual life is not the methodic repetition of a few pious practices which have been approved of, for some time, in society. It is to live with God, in a changing world. It is to work with God in constant response to His wishes. Spiritual life, like any other kind, is not at all static: it is dynamic. That is the very definition the ancient philosophers gave of life. To reduce the spiritual life to a few practices and observances is to fulfil God's will as it suits our convenience, for the sake of a feeling of self-satisfaction. It easily enables us to think ourselves just and to despise others (Lk 18 : 9).

This harmony with God and his designs is never an accomplished fact. One looks for God, his presence, his will, his action, lives with Him as one finds Him, responds to Him as His words are progressively being revealed. It is only at the last moment of our lives, if ever, we can say that we have fully accomplished His designs (Jn 19 : 30).

Harmony indeed is a peaceful situation, but the way to it is laborious and full of combats and struggles. The forces of disintegration are always at work in us and around us. We are easily tempted to give up the effort, to imagine we have reached the goal, to think we have done so by our own resources, to look for substitutes, etc. These are the different vices and 'concupiscences'. Anything that disturbs our peace with God has to be dug out and removed forthwith. If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away (Mt 5 : 29-30).

This harmony is particularly fostered in prayerful communion with God, according to the example of Christ Jesus.

God's action in us through the sacraments will have the desired result only if the heart, the core of our being, is trained to respond to God and live with God in prayer. But this prayer, from the mere habit of repeating some formulas and performing certain practices, should not grow into a habitual attitude of the heart. It is essentially an invisible communion with the invisible God born of, and sustained by, love. The intensity of our communion is proportionate to the love we have for God.

Harmony with God is impossible without harmony with men who are His representatives and the objects of His love and care to such an extent that He even died for them. The inner peace with God is reflected and expressed in our peace with men, and our peace with men in turn achieves for us a more profound peace with God.

Harmony is achieved through perfect agreement with God. In order to establish it one should see eye to eye with God, share His vision, wish His wishes, will His will, work along with Him, and diligently abstain from everything that may impair or disturb it.

#### **4. Growing into the Full Stature of Christ**

In the basic and eternal plan of God, we are made to live with God in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1: 3-10). He is the perfect realization of the harmony between God and man, between man and man, between man and the universe. In Christ Jesus everyone and everything are gathered up around God (Eph. 1: 10) (Cor. 15: 28). Conformity with Christ, understood in all its details, is the means of achieving conformity with God and His designs because Christ is the perfect programme set forth by God for man so that he may live with God and according to God.

Christian spirituality is living in the company of God in Christ, with Christ and like Christ. A Christian is born to God by inserting himself into Christ through baptism by which, in response to the interior grace that comes to him, he begins to have Christ's attitude towards God and men, think his thoughts,

continue his approaches and identify himself with his programmes. By baptism he is immersed in Christ, becomes his member and branch and begins to co-operate with Christ so that he may live and work through him. Baptism is a sacrament, an action of Christ's, that gives internal grace and makes one share in the transforming love of God, through an established symbolic action. The result is that the person is born anew in Christ Jesus, is inserted into him, is capable of living his life, and becomes a son in the Son. It is possible for a baptized person fully or partially to ignore this new situation—as often happens—and continue to live as before as if nothing had occurred except that he was present at a particular ceremony of the Church at a very tender age. On the other hand, he can progressively realize what was begun at baptism by responding to the action of Christ in and through the Church, through the sacraments, and through all the realities and events around him.

To live a Christian life is to identify oneself progressively with the real life of Christ. Growth takes place through assimilation. Assimilation takes place through the response of the one assimilated to the action of the one who assimilates. In Christian life it is the response of the Christian to the action of Christ, to the action of God in Christ, which takes place in the situations already indicated. Of all the ways in which Christ acts, the sacrament of Holy Eucharist has very special importance. It is the sacrament of growth *par excellence*, as baptism is the sacrament of birth. "He who eats my body, and drinks my blood, lives in me, and I in him; as I live by the living Father, he also shall live by me" (Jn 6 : 57-58). Here again the actual growth and assimilation will take place only to the degree of one's inner response to God. Holy Communion is a sacramental means of communion with Christ, but in reality it is a personal communion that takes place at the deeper level of personal exchanges through faith, hope and love. One has also to co-operate willingly in the transforming action of Christ by co-operating willingly with the will of Christ which is the expression of the will of God. Herein lies again the sacrificial aspect of the sacrament of the Eucharist with its application to actual Christian life. The core of the sacrifice of Christ is his loving surrender to the will of God unto the death of self. One shares in the sacrifice of Christ



by the same process of dying to one's self in order to do the will of the living God. Meaningful participation in the sacrifice of Christ is the chosen means of transformation and growth into Christ. Growing into Christ and with Christ is a responding to Christ as well as a responding like Christ, and this response has the characteristics of universality and openness explained above. Christ was not closed up in a system so as to be a slave to it and did not place himself in a condition that made it impossible for him to respond freely to all the actions of God. Being a Jew he was faithful to the Jewish way of life, but this did not impede him from rising above its limitations to surrender himself to the total will of God about him, at the cost of his life. He said he did not come to destroy the law but to fulfil it (Mt 5: 17). This is what he did by fully responding to all the expressions of God's will instead of doggedly adhering to one particular expression, and that too more to the letter than to the spirit of the law.

He responded to God with the freedom of a child of God. This, of course, did not mean his taking the easy course of following his own whims and fancies. It meant his burying himself completely so that God might live in him and exercise His will freely in him. The freedom of the children of God is not the freedom to do one's own will but the freedom to do God's will; it always entails death to one's will, and this is indeed freedom from the slavery of self. The purpose of all forms of mortification and asceticism integrated in the Christian way of life is to accelerate and perpetuate the death of self. As Paul says, "I bear in me the death of Christ that his life also may be made manifest in my mortal body" (2 Cor. 4:10).

The universal principle of growth into Christ, common to the sacramental, ecclesiastical and other forms of the action of Christ is progressive assimilation into the death and resurrection of Christ, by which one dies to sin and lives to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:11). In every way a man gives up his undue emphasis on his self which recedes in order to give God His due place in his life. By progressively entering into the paschal mystery of Christ, by dying to self and living in Christ Jesus, one realises the basic law of growth in Christ.

This growth and transformation into Christ is not merely an isolated individualistic affair but it has a built-in social dimension. By growing into Christ we grow in the love he has for God and men, and all that is dear to Christ becomes dear to us. If this does not happen it means that one is not being intimately assimilated into Christ. Our union with Christ, who unites every one to himself, unites us to one another with the same bond. This should move us to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), to rejoice with one another and weep with one another (Rom. 12:15; Cor. 12:26), so that we may have one heart and one soul with all other men (Acts 4:32). We have to treat one another as members of Christ and members of one another (Rom. 12:5; Cor. 12:25, 27).

In order to grow into Christ we have to keep him, his deeds and his world vision before our eyes. Christian spirituality requires us to live with God, men and the world as Christ lived with them. A Christian has to love God and surrender himself to Him as Christ did. He has to love men so as to give himself up for men (Eph. 5:2; Gal. 2:20). He has to use the world as a platform for a life of love and sacrifice, as a medium of response and communion.

### Conclusion

Christian spirituality is communion with God in Christ Jesus. Man's call to existence is equally a call to this communion, which is as basic a reality as existence itself. But unlike existence it takes place only in proportion to one's inner response to God, one's readiness to live with Him.

The whole existential situation of man—the world of men, ideas, culture, civilization, scientific progress, political revolutions, the whole universe and all that takes place in it—is, in the plan of God, designed to promote this communion with God. It is man's resistance to the plan of God, his refusal to think and move with Him, that is the source of all the misery of mankind. Man has to overcome the tendency to isolate himself from God. He has to strive to cooperate in the action of Christ as expressed through various means, in order that all men may be gathered up as one body in him, and God may be all in all.

# Spirituality, Yesterday and Today

## Introduction

By the word "spirituality" we mean the day-to-day living out of our relationship with God, which we have in Christ. This day-to-day living is, at one and the same time, a divine power and a human living, blended together marvellously. As a divine power our spirituality is the power of the Risen Christ at work in us. As a human living, the living of our spirituality is expressed and develops in human ways.

Spirituality is lived through our minds, our human thoughts. It makes use of human words, language, ways of expression. It is lived by men—it is marked by their character.

It is lived in an actual world, faces actual problems, and is moulded and affected by this.

Spirituality then will always have a double characteristic. There will be in it a basic unchanging element—the Spirit at work in us is always the same Spirit and His goal is always the same goal. The broad values, the basic principles, will always remain the same.

But, since spirituality is something lived and lived by men, it will be subject, as men are, to a certain extent, to the forces of history. Men's ways of thinking, the actual problems they face, the mentality of their era, — all these will mould spirituality without touching its basic values. The Spirit acts gently according to men's needs.

This must be so. The great reality of Christianity is the Spirit of the Risen Christ at work in the hearts of men, ever striving to build the Body of Christ. He works, adapts, stirs men, and answers the needs of each man and each century.



In a study of Spirituality, then, we have to be very conscious of history. We have to be conscious of the unchangeable elements as well. Both are the work of the Holy Spirit.

When we speak of "modern spirituality" or "the spirituality of today" we are actually speaking of "What the Spirit is saying to the Church today". The approach, the emphasis, the ways of expression, the great needs of today – all these are part of what the Spirit is saying to each one of us. Our Christian vocation and our Christian conscience require that we should know them.

The most evident and striking factor about the spirituality of today is that it is undergoing a very deep and startling change. Something very different from the spirituality of yesterday is emerging in the Church. Yet it is from the spirituality of yesterday (which we term traditional) that it is emerging. Change is never totally new in human affairs. It has a common basis with the past, and the forces that give rise to change have their roots in the past. To understand "change" I have to understand what I change from, as much as what I change into.

Vital, then, in our day is the need for a critical analysis of traditional and modern spirituality and a comparison between them. If what was said in the beginning is kept in mind we should look for the basic values, common to both, which have not changed, and also for the variable elements that have changed. We must look for those elements that were the product of ways of thinking of one generation, or that arose owing to historical pressures. We must also look for the influences that moulded both and made them what they were and are.

## **The Common Ground**

Whatever the age, whatever the needs, whatever the emphasis, these elements should be found in any authentic Christian spirituality:

- a) a sharing in the life of God
- b) through His Son Jesus Christ;

- c) through a personal holiness, the essence and heart of which is charity
- d) lived in the Church;
- e) in an effective charity expressed in all the virtues;
- f) a charity nourished by the Eucharist, the sacraments and personal prayer;
- g) a charity that involves self-denial.

This is the core, the basic reality, the foundation of the spirituality of any age.

### **The Influences**

But the viewpoint from which men approach spirituality, the terms they use, the emphasis they place on one thing or another, will reflect the historical and personal influences that were at work on them.

Our particular interest is the 19th century and our own times. Let us see what were the influences that were at work moulding the variable of these two spiritualities.

### **Traditional Spirituality**

Broadly speaking, in the history of the Church, the years 1500-1900 can be taken as one era, which began with the first stirrings of the Reformation. At that time the general approach of the Church was defensive, as one might well expect since every part of her teaching and practice was challenged. A defensive attitude always highlights fidelity and conformity. It expresses itself through clear firm rulings and decisions, and is suspicious of new ideas. This was the first influence at work in the formation of traditional spirituality.

Two streams of spirituality converged in the 19th century, each making its own contribution to traditional spirituality. The first was *Devotio Moderna*, a spirituality that arose in Europe in the 15th century to answer a need of the Church. With a decline in liturgy, and in spiritual and intellectual standards among the clergy, and because current spiritualities were inadequate to the people's needs, religion in Europe was at a low ebb. A group of

men called Brothers of the Common Life sought to bring to average people a way of life that would make them truly religious. What they worked out was called *Devotio Moderna*. It was a spirituality of great simplicity, based on the idea of real inner conversion. It stressed the need for personal spiritual effort, simple solid virtue, devout prayer, methodical mental prayer and self-denial. It was suspicious of humanism, which was becoming a strong influence at the time. Taken up by St Ignatius Loyola and the Jesuits, *Devotio Moderna* was established as the basis of Christian spirituality for four centuries. It was authentic, sincere, and adequate to the needs of the time and suited to the mood of the Church.

The second stream was the Oratorian School of spirituality which flourished in France in the 17th and 18th centuries. Centred on Christ, this fervent spirituality gave greater depth and warmth to *Devotio Moderna*. It gave us devotion to the Eucharistic Lord and the Sacred Heart. However, it was also very suspicious of human nature with its manifold frailties which it tended to overstress, and as a result some were led astray into Jansenism and Quietism.

A third influence on traditional spirituality was the peculiar political situation and way of thinking in 19th-century France. The Church of the day found herself in opposition to the French Revolution. Consequently, her whole concept of authority and obedience remained strongly centralised and authoritative.

### Modern Spirituality

Some of the influences that have affected modern spirituality are :

1. The personal spirituality of St Therese of Liseux
2. The deeply theological analysis of 'Christ in our life' which figures in the writings of Abbot Marmion
3. The Liturgical Revival and the Biblical Revival
4. The events of World War II which high-lighted the sacred value of each human person

5. The insight of the Church into the true spiritual meaning of Christ's Resurrection
6. Vatican II with its insight into the Church as a Community of Love.

In fact one might condense these influences into two: "person" and "community". These have become, from different angles, vital concepts of our time. All the influences mentioned above converge on two different visions of the nature of the Church. The first is the vision of a divine organisation, founded to guide man authoritatively and to aid him sacramentally as he strives to imitate Christ and sanctify his soul. The second is the vision of a community of persons each of whom has something unique to give to all. They are gathered into a community around Christ by their sharing of One Spirit and One Sacramental life, and they are served in this life by an authority that respects the gifts of each and that rules in love.

### **A Comparison**

It is time now to compare the two spiritualities and to measure one against the other so that we may see the full significance of the change. It is necessary to state, first of all, that both were absolutely authentic Christian spiritualities. They were called forth by the needs of the day; they sanctified men and women and led them to God. The basic elements of a true Christian spirituality were to be found in each. For historical reasons they presented these elements differently.

The most basic and telling point of comparison is this: traditional spirituality described the Christian life in terms of things. Modern spirituality describes the same Christian life in terms of persons. The basic realities are the same: God, Christ, Holiness, the Church, Charity. Traditional spirituality spoke of them in terms of "grace", "perfection", "virtue", "obligation", "duty", "soul", "passion", "merit", "law", thus adopting an impersonal approach. Modern spirituality builds up a picture in terms of persons: "life in Christ", "life in the Spirit", "the inner imperative of charity", "community", "God in the situation of the moment".



Traditional spirituality methodically portrayed the Christian life from the viewpoint of man striving upwards to perfection. It described men as looking and reaching up to God, moved by the vital importance of salvation, and as rooting out his passions, putting on the virtues of Christ, seeking strength in prayer and sacrament, and looking forward always to Heaven, and to full union with God. The realities are all there but the approach is man-centred, is a "ladder of perfection".

Modern spirituality is "person" conscious. It is more aware of Biblical ideas of Covenant, Dialogue, Encounter. So it portrays Christian life from the opposite viewpoint. It is the viewpoint of God pouring out his love on man: inviting, revealing and calling in the Person of Christ, with man answering, responding, to a personal call, by a personal encounter with Christ in Baptism, which brings him into the community of persons who are in Christ and are sharing the Spirit of Christ; a community which reflects and shares the love of the three Persons of the Trinitarian Community: It is a God-centred vision. The action begins in God, reaches man, and draws him back into God. It is a "circle of shared life".

### **"A sharing in the life of God"**

Essential to all concepts of Christian holiness, this sharing was described by traditional spirituality through the concept of grace. Grace was a quality of the soul, a sort of supernatural "thing" which cleansed it and took away sin and adorned it and gave it a certain sharing in the life of God. It was conceived of as something which came out from God and lodged in the soul. By virtuous living we developed it, we acquired more, and it blossomed out in Faith, Hope and Charity. Modern spirituality, true to its basic influences, sees Christian life as a sharing in the life of Christ. It also sees the inner presence, within the Christian, of the Spirit in whom Christ rose from the dead. It is something transforming the person — a personal sharing with Christ and with one's brethren, of Our Father in one Spirit.

## **“ Through His Son Jesus Christ ”**

Traditional spirituality was fully authentic for the place it gave to Christ in the spiritual life of a Christian. It had deep roots in a spiritual heritage that gave a warm-hearted picture of the Saviour. Christ was the meritorious cause of all grace, a model for the Christian, the Teacher. His love animated all Christian life; His Eucharistic Presence informed the whole Church. It was particularly aware of all the phases through which Christ lived and of his mystery among us: his Infancy, his Public life, his Passion, the Eucharist. Modern spirituality has moved ahead in this direction and urges a direct awareness of the very mystery of Christ itself. It is not so taken up with Christ, the Model, or with the phases of the mystery of Christ as it is with the mystery itself: Christ living in the Christian, living his Paschal mystery in each of us, the Risen Christ. Our life is a life IN CHRIST. Modern spirituality seeks to express the link between Christ and the Christian in a deeper way than before. Here it is true to its basic concepts of person and community. Life is our personal encounter with the Risen Christ in the Church.

## **“ In personal holiness - the heart of which is charity ”**

Traditional spirituality saw charity as the peak and centre of Christian life. But it expressed this in the setting of man seeking union with God along the path of virtue. Charity was shown as the motive power of all Christian effort, the form of all virtue. Charity should light up every Christian action with a pure intention. The list of Christian virtues was topped by charity to one's neighbour. The supreme charity was to be found in doing God's will as unfolded by authority.

Modern spirituality goes further and deeper. It does not regard charity as a virtue among virtues. It is the heart of Christian life. It is the centre of the Invitation-Response. It is something which I share with Christ and my brethren. Charity is the love of Christ shared with me. Christian life is the expansion of this charity into every corner of life. It is the whole

meaning of the Church; she is a community of shared Charity. This is the Christian mystery: in loving my brother I find and love God. Modern spirituality is not afraid of the word "love". It brings a truly out-going human love to merge with divine charity.

### **"Lived in the Church"**

Traditional spirituality grew up in an era when the Church was primarily aware of herself as an organisation, divine in origin and divinely guaranteed. She had a God-given authority to preach the Word, to administer the Sacraments and to rule the faithful. "The Church" was almost identified with the teaching Church. The centre of the vision was her authority, and the Spirit spoke through that authority almost exclusively. The laity were those who listened and obeyed. The Church was not very conscious of the charismatic element in her: the voice and work of the Spirit among the people. Nor was she so conscious of the mystery which is hers: she reflects and shares the unity in charity of the Trinity. The Church was defensive in attitude. She was not so conscious of her creativity. She feared all change and so lost sight of her other gifts like freshness and adaptability. Traditional spirituality adopted a parallel view of authority. God spoke from above and in the sacrifice of submission to authority one was sanctified. Fidelity was a great value. Obedience was blind. Through a watchful spirit and through correction authority preserved and guarded the faithful. Traditional spirituality had a great devotion to God's will, a deep faith in His voice which spoke through authority, a generous readiness for sacrifice. It was individualistic in its basic outlook.

Modern spirituality owes a great deal to the light thrown by Vatican II on the nature of the Church. It sees, as the central reality of all life, the Church as the whole of Christ: as a people gathered together by the Father, around Christ, and sharing one Spirit. All else is interpreted and gets its proper place in the light of this central mystery. The daily realization of this mystery is the Eucharist. Authority is viewed in the light of it as a service to the community. The Spirit can speak in other ways than through authority. He speaks and works charismatically, by

the inner power of the Gospel in men's hearts. He never clashes with authority, but authority has got to seek and listen for his voice in and among ordinary persons. Thus arises a new spirituality of obedience.

**“An effective charity expressed in all the virtues”**

Traditional spirituality had a very clear-cut, logical and practical programme of Christian living, with no nonsense about it. It emphasized that holiness cost a lot. It placed a strong emphasis on self-denial. Owing to its over-all vision, however, and to the anti-humanist tendencies that were strong in the forces that shaped it, it was rather sweeping in the signification that it gave to the word “self”. Personal values, such as the need of achievement or the need of appreciation, or the need for recognition of personal gifts meant little to it. Much that was truly human and good was sweepingly included in the word ‘self’. Traditional spirituality had a clear and precise picture of the Christian virtues and their demands. They were “habits” and were not conceived of in personal terms. Faith was in “truths”; fidelity was to “one’s duties” and to “the will of God”. Fidelity was indeed the key virtue, as one would expect from the over-all picture.

Modern spirituality subscribes to the same Christian virtues, but it presents them more personally, more positively, and in a more unified way. The virtues are the ways in which I am personally involved with Christ and live his life. They are “charity lived.” Self denial is not so much “no” to self as “yes” to God. Faith is not so much in truths as in a person: Jesus Christ. The dominance of charity in the Christian life is made to stand out even more than it did before. Our life in Christ is seen as our responsive answer to the challenge of the charity we share in: not in terms of virtues or fidelity.

**“Nourished by the Eucharist, the sacraments, and prayer”**

Traditional spirituality was very Eucharist-centred but not liturgical in the true sense of the word. It saw the Mass and the sacraments as the true sources of Christian life, as channels of



grace to the soul. Frequentation of the sacraments was at the heart of its picture of life. Prayer was the life of the Christian: prayer that made great use of methods and devotional aids that had developed in the Church from the Middle Ages onwards. It was warm and attractive in its piety. It was a little inward-looking and inclined to withdraw too much from life, and over-calculating in its methods and means such as the examen. This sacramental and devotional life, to be sure, led men to contemplate the actual mystery of Christ.

Modern spirituality, true to its vision of the Church, sees the Eucharist primarily as liturgy: as the whole Body of Christ, with Jesus Himself, renewing the Paschal Mystery by which we live. The sacraments are not just sources of grace but the acting Presence of the Risen Christ among us. Prayer is less linked with methods and seeks to be more personal and communitarian in the sense of "shared". Devotions have receded, because our whole attitude is to contemplate and live the mystery of Christ in itself, and not through devotional forms. Modern spirituality is more outward-looking in its means of developing spirituality. All that concerns you as a person is important. All that makes "you" is not an accident of heredity but part of the loving invitation of God. Your gifts are to be opened out and used in charity. Your limitations are to be used and renovated in charity. Your response to God must develop you as a human being. Modern spirituality is personal, communitarian and out-going in witness.

## **Dangers of Modern Spirituality**

In a comparison like this one inevitably seems to give the impression that Modern spirituality is marvellous and flawless. We see it as the product of what the Spirit is saying to the Church today, we are enthusiastic about it, but we should be neither blind nor naive. It has dangers, which I would list thus:

1. A system built on responsibility is dangerous in the hands of people who are not responsible.
2. Many people may misunderstand Christian freedom, and come to sanctify their own preferences always.

3. Recognition and use of one's gifts and talents is good, but there is a danger of these gifts becoming absolutes. That they are "for the Church" may be forgotten.
4. With the receding of devotions and abandonment of methods, personal prayer might be neglected, before adequate substitutes for the old forms are found. Charitable activity may tend to edge out prayer.
5. Personalism may become Individualism.
6. Obedience may cease to be an effective religious virtue, through a misunderstanding of the true meaning of the superior-subject relationship.

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# The Experience of Prayer

## Some New Testament Indications

In the New Testament there are four types of materials on prayer. The first consists of express teaching on the subject. The best example perhaps is Mt 6. 5-8, "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; they like to say their prayers standing up in the synagogue and at street-corners, for everyone to see them. But when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in the secret place; and your Father who sees what is secret will reward you". Or there is Luke 11. 5-13, where it is argued that if men, bad as they are, answer their children's requests with good things and satisfy a friend's importunity at least in order to be rid of it, all the more will God who is good, who loves men and who is only longing to be allowed to load us with blessings, answer our prayers beyond all asking and all expectation.

The second type of material comprises samples or patterns of prayer. Such samples were given by Jesus as part of lessons in prayer which his disciples asked for.<sup>(1)</sup> The brief prayers which the Master said from time to time were later recalled, and small collections of them made. Thus we have the Lord's Prayer as given in Luke 11. 2-4, "Father, may your name be held holy. May your reign come. Give us the bread we daily need. Forgive us our sins as we also forgive our debtors. Do not let us fall into temptation"<sup>(2)</sup>. In Matthew we have a larger collection with additional little prayers coming from Jesus himself or from the early Christian community.<sup>(3)</sup> Other examples of these short, telling prayers would be the words in Gethsemane

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1. Luke 11. 1

2. Luke 11. 2-4

3. Matt 6. 9-13

and on Calvary; 'Father, let this chalice pass.' 'Father, forgive them.' 'Father, into your hands I entrust my life'. Or, 'Remember me when you come into your kingdom'.<sup>(4)</sup> These beautiful samples of prayer illustrate Jesus' teaching on the topic, about being brief and not long or wordy.

The third type points to examples of actual praying. The account of Gethsemane is the best known and most classical. That the greater his anguish of spirit the more pressing became his prayer is a point worth noting. Jesus prayed on the banks of the Jordan, and in lonely places in the quiet of the morning, and spent whole nights on mountain-tops in communion with God. He gave thanks regularly not only for food but especially for the revelation that had come from the Father to the lowly men who had become his disciples. And before the Father he thrilled with joy. Watching Jesus at prayer must have been an inspiring experience to his disciples. Some of them felt a new love of prayer awaken in their hearts, which led them spontaneously to say, 'Lord, teach us to pray.'<sup>(5)</sup> These occasional prayers of Jesus sprang from the abiding prayer which lay in his soul like a warm, moving sea before the face of God.

The fourth type is made up of certain situations of prayer, certain points of crisis in life, or moments of decision, when men turn to God, open up to His guidance, ponder things over and move towards what Ignatius of Loyola would call an election. There are several of these in the New Testament narrative. In relation to most of them no explicit mention of prayer is made, but given the tradition of religions and the habit of men in regard to prayer, given the Old Testament practice and the New Testament position as indicated in the three types of prayer material described above, the passages concerned may be taken for significant prayer-situations which hold for us many

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4. Luke 23. 34, 46; 22. 42; Mt 26. 39. The prayers in the fourth Gospel, like the speeches assigned there to Jesus, are longer, cf Jn 17.

5. Lk 22. 40-43; 3. 21; Mk. 1. 35; 6. 12, 41; 8. 6; 14. 35; Mt 11. 25-26 = Lk 10. 21



practical and concrete lessons on the subject, and reveal its main lineaments. We are therefore going to examine a few of these passages. Though some involve serious critical problems, we take the texts as they stand in the belief that whatever be their literary form or the history of their shaping, they are there for our instruction and our consolation.

### 1. Joseph has to make a decision.

Mt 1. 18 – 24.

Joseph was faced with a knotty problem. He did not solve it with the sword. He refused to deal with it in anger or despair, or in spiritual insensitivity, letting things be. He tackled the situation in justice. To the whole matter, to every aspect of it, and to everybody concerned, he would give due consideration. The text says he pondered the matter over. He would be loyal to his conscience and in conscience he would not accept the woman betrothed to him since she was now with child before ever he had touched her. But neither could he in conscience and in loyalty to the woman denounce her as an adulteress and hand her over to be stoned. He did not in fact know how far, if at all, she was to blame. And after all who was he to sit in judgement over her? He would not hurt her. She should be spared as much pain as can be. The only way for him out of this dilemma was to give to Mary a note of divorce and send her away in secret. So she and her child would live; they would find their way through life, and may God be with them. For many days, morning and night, he turned the matter over in his mind, in the light of his conscience and before the Face of his God.

For God too was in it; and for Joseph to think things over meant also that he should turn to God and open up to His light. And light and guidance came through the medium of a dream, in the quiet of a deep experience of the Divine. As Joseph was just and delicately considerate to his conscience and to his neighbour, he was able to discern the voice of God and the touch of his Spirit, coming to him in and through the toil of his own spirit and through his anguished search for a course of action least painful to others, most honouring the plans and

purposes of God and truly serviceable to them. From this narrative one may disengage, for study, several elements that go to constitute prayer: standing by one's conscience, being thoughtful of others and being ready to think for oneself in an attempt to come by the right attitude and the right action; having recourse to God in openness to whatever solution to our problems he might help emerge, even if it should transcend our own reasoned conclusions; finally, and in particular, being sensitive to God's presence so as to be able to discern the action of the Spirit in us and in the human situation. Unknown to us, His Spirit moves us to seek, and then in the discovery and decision to which we steadily sail up or into which we are conveyed on a sudden, we became conscious of Him in an experience which He gives, and of which the interiority, intimacy and mystery are perhaps best indicated in terms of sleep and dream. This total experience is prayer.

## 2. Mary faces a crisis

Lk 1. 26 – 38

Mary's was a deeply disturbing experience. She was upset and afraid. What could all this mean, this movement within her, this sense of a presence, this pressure upon her spirit, this thing which could only be spoken of as a voice, and an unfamiliar word of greeting, and this joy so full of fear? She could react sharply to the situation, refuse it totally, destroy it, and flee from it to seek her own quiet and peace. But she could also accept the burden of it all, and wait on God, and leave in His hands her future and her destiny. It is this second way she would gladly choose. Still uncertain and fearful, she wondered, and began to search for a clearer word and a clear vision.<sup>(6)</sup> She began to ponder over the things she had treasured in her heart from her early years. She recalled the story of her people and meditated on God's past dealings with those that feared him, with Sara, Israel's mother, and with Anna, the mother of Samuel. She remembered his kindness to those that were lowly, like the women Matthew mentions in his genealogy of

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6. Lk 2. 49, 51

Jesus: Tamar and Rahab and Ruth, ancestors of David whose son, through Solomon the son of Bathseba, the Messiah of Israel was to be. She knew that the substance of the Old Testament message was that God was a merciful Saviour who put down the haughty and the rich, and fed the hungry and lifted up the humble<sup>(7)</sup>. In her society her own son would be a lowly person. He would have friends, but he would also be despised, contradicted and rejected. She could almost hear people ask, "Is this not the carpenter, is this not the son of Mary?"<sup>(8)</sup> But she had heard not only of the humiliation of Yahweh's Servant but also of his exaltation<sup>(9)</sup>. She could therefore lean on God and build her life on His word. As she sat in the shadow of Old Testament history and reflected upon God's ways and her own situation, she felt deeply comforted, the strength of God growing in her limbs.

The prayer situation we have here opens with a crisis concerning which a decision has to be made. There is on Mary's part a humble approach and recourse to God in His known deeds and words, in a concerned search for a way out. There is finally the profound experience of the Divine, which is discerned as God's strength over-shadowing her and as the brooding of the Holy Spirit. The whole experience is prayer: the concrete situation in life with its problems and pains; the simple, earnest endeavour to grasp it in depth, which is at the same time a movement towards God and a response to His voice which comes to Mary, comes to man, imperceptibly, perceptibly; the peaceful awareness of Him who meanwhile has moved towards man, spreading within him his unobtrusive light in which man's life shapes, comes to decision, and finds its own identity. Man's identity is that he is God's servant. In God's word he is being continually made and remade, provided he accepts it with a sincere *fiat*: 'Let it be so with me'.

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7. Lk 1. 46-56; cf 1 Sam 1. and 2. 1-10

8. Lk 2. 34; Mk 6. 2-3; Mt 13. 54-56

9. Isaiah 53

### 3. Jesus' life takes a new turn

Mk 1. 9-11 = Mt 3. 13-17 = Lk 3. 21-22

It happened on the Jordan. It was a soul-stirring experience for Jesus. There his life gained in weight and meaning, broadened out on the world and became marked with a new awareness and a new urgency. Luke rightly describes it as a prayer-experience. It began when Jesus set out on the journey from Galilee to Aenon near Salim on the Jordan<sup>(10)</sup>. Jesus had always kept his spirit open to God and sensitive to His presence and action in the events of common human history. Down south near the Salt Sea John was preaching penitence and baptizing people. Men were coming to him in great numbers from all over the land, from Jerusalem and the whole of Judea and the regions around the Jordan<sup>(11)</sup>. In this Jesus saw the work of God and heard His voice, to which he would be obedient. He joined the crowd, stood in the penitents' line in great simplicity and clarity of spirit, and got baptized by John. This single-hearted Godwardness is now met by God with an overwhelming communication of Himself in the depth and centre of Jesus' own self. The Gospels depict Jesus' experience of it in surpassingly perfect imagery. Jesus saw and felt heaven open wide and bare itself to his soul, conveying to it the burden of the mystery of God's plan for the salvation of men. He felt the Spirit of God invading his own and taking hold of it powerfully in a flood of peace such as man cannot give or grasp<sup>(12)</sup>. He heard the voice of God in the silent recesses of his heart and in every limb and fibre of his body. And the voice of God spoke directly to him, addressed him personally, pointedly, and said, "You are my son, my servant, you are my chosen and loved one, and upon you my favour rests."<sup>(13)</sup>

Suddenly Jesus discovered new dimensions in himself and saw the range of his life expand on every side. He found himself

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10: Jn 3. 23

11: Mt 3. 5

12: Jn 14. 27; cf Phil 4. 7

13: Isaiah 42. 1; ps 2. 7



anew in the word God had addressed to him. God had focussed on him select lines of Old Testament history, of Old Testament words, images, hopes and expectations; and now Jesus felt these converge on him and press for fulfilment. Here was also consolation and the deep-going comforting of the Holy Spirit. Here rang in his soul the word which challenged him with God's tenderness and which by naming him anew recreated him and endowed him with an unprecedented sense of the significance of his existence. This was prayer, intimate union, direct experience of the Divine, clear and profound, preceded by humble submissiveness to God and followed by practical fidelity to his call<sup>(14)</sup>. It was for Jesus an unforgettable hour of vital encounter with God and of express consecration and commission as the Messiah.

From the three instances we have studied the following elements and stages of prayer emerge. The basis of prayer is the general disposition of openness to God and of readiness to be guided by him. Joseph was a just man and would not compromise his nor his neighbour's honour. Mary lived within the living tradition of the Hebrew religion. Old Testament events and experiences were a 'lamp to her feet and a light on her path'<sup>(15)</sup>. And Jesus remained awake to God's word and work in human life. Next there is the human initiative, the movement as it were from below. Joseph would ponder over a delicate situation, and Mary seek clarification and conviction, while Jesus would journey to John's place and accept a baptism of penitence. There is finally the movement from above, God's answering and redeeming advent. A divine communication suggests to Joseph a new solution to his problem, and to Mary a new approach to the crisis of her life. In Jesus' case the answering self-gift of God stands him in a totally new situation in which his life is transformed and steadied for an unheard-of mission full of conflict.

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14. Mk 1. 12; Lk 4. 1

15. Ps 119. 105; cf Lk 1. 45-56

#### 4. Cross-roads

Mt 4. 1-11 = Lk 4. 1-13 = Mk 1. 12-13.

The conflict was between God's views and ways and man's. From his boyhood and especially since the Jordan experience Jesus had been clearly taking sides with God and seeking to collaborate in his plans. These he had to seek and discover from day to day, from one stage of his life to another, for now he belonged within our history and was heir to our growing; striving and waiting. At the same time God was always free to share with him His own Spirit and vision. The question that faced Jesus as he set out on his messianic path concerned the concrete shape of the mission entrusted to him and the actual path he had to tread. Among his people there were two models and mental images of the Messiah. One was the popular image of the Prince-Messiah who would restore Davidic times, re-establish the land in prosperity, in political and total freedom, and inaugurate the millennium. The disciples asked Jesus, "Will you now set up the kingdom for Israel?" Even the twelve would argue about who was greatest in the kingdom, and two of them sought seats closest to the King's throne<sup>(16)</sup>. The other model was of a more spiritual figure cherished in the widening circle of the Essenes, which was concerned with right living and the preparation for the inbreak of the end-time when God alone would rule<sup>(17)</sup>. Which of these two models was to be the ideal for Jesus, and the mould for his life? Which of them reflected God's own plans? Here was a situation which called for prayerful search and decision.

Jesus went into solitude to ponder the matter. He waited on the word of God and searched the Scriptures. There again he came across two images of the personality through whom God was to make his definitive entrance into history. There was the picture of the royal Messiah of David's line who was to rule

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16. Acts 1.6; Mk 9. 34-06; 10. 35-45

17. Much of this is reflected in the first two chapters of Luke

the earth with an iron rod. <sup>(18)</sup> There was also the servant of Yahweh who was willing to bear the burden of the wrong-doing of His people and accept death so that many might live in freedom<sup>(19)</sup>. Which of these was the foreshadow of Jesus' own destiny? It was vital for Jesus to know this as it had consequences for practical daily life and for the people to whom he was sent. The Scriptures alone could not help. They had to be discerned. It was a new taste and sense of God's discerning spirit that Jesus needed in order to clarify his vision, to focus his thoughts, and to make sure that his heart beat in harmony with God's. In this striving, in this long (forty days) lonely search he was met by God. Mark and Matthew close the account of these experiences of Jesus with the mention of angels who came and waited on him; and all the synoptics associate the situation with the experience of the Holy Spirit's leadership<sup>(20)</sup>. God's presence and His self-giving Word were there with their comforting. And in the Spirit there was the possibility of discerning the scriptures. Jesus saw that he was indeed a royal Messiah and his message had to do with the kingdom of God. But he was also the Suffering Servant, loyal in his love, with a love that kneels to serve, and shares the tragedy of human existence. He could now discern between a service of bread that perishes and of bread that gives life to the world<sup>(21)</sup>. He could therefore take clear positions and with sharp reaction cast behind him whatever was adverse to God's designs, whether temptation came from the devil, or whether it came from Peter: "Get behind me, Satan!"<sup>(22)</sup>

It would be a mistake to think that this prayer-experience was had but once in the life of Jesus, and after that he walked a highway clear of trial and testing. The fact is that temptation marked his life to the end. An early tradition sums up the whole thing in a few words! "And the Spirit drove him into the wilderness. There he was for forty days and was tempted

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18. ps 2; Lk 1. 32-33

19. Is 53

20. Mt 4. 1, 11; Mk 1. 12; Lk 4. 1

21. Mt 4. 3-4; Jn 6. 27-33

22. Mt 4. 10; Mk 8. 31-33

by Satan. He lived with wild beasts and angels served him.”<sup>(23)</sup> But Luke and Matthew elaborate the tradition and present it dramatically<sup>(24)</sup>. It is to be noticed that both these pictures agree in presenting not just one single temptation but a series of temptations. Luke further observes that it was but for a time that Satan withdrew from Jesus. He was to return. Every time Jesus would have to reflect, and seek the guidance of the Spirit to meet a crisis. His enemies tested him by demanding signs from heaven and by urging him to repeat, in his home-town, the works of power which, according to hearsay, he had done in Capernaum<sup>(25)</sup>. They sought continually to obstruct his progress and force him into their ways of Sabbath observance, ancestral traditions, fasts and ostracisms of those they considered sinners<sup>(26)</sup>. And finally they challenged him: “Save yourself if you are the Son of God, and come down from the Cross.”<sup>(27)</sup>

Jesus’ relatives who did not believe, any more than most other Jews, that he could do works of power, said to him, “If you can do such things show yourself to the world, go south to Jerusalem, and let your disciples see your performances and be astonished.” To them his ways were so strange that they concluded he was out of his mind and sought to take him and lock him up<sup>(28)</sup>. Even the disciples for a long time thought differently from Jesus and attempted to press him into ways they fancied for their Master. To them the Master was great and had no time for those who would bring their children to him to take his touch and his blessing. Peter takes him aside and remonstrates with him on his readiness to accept rejection and death at the hands of the nation’s leaders and priests. James and John would have Jesus let them command fire to fall from heaven upon an ungracious Samaritan village. Jesus then had constantly to be on guard against seduction, and the strain of it is reflected

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23. Mk 1. 12-13

24. Mt 4. 1-11; Lk 4. 1-13

25. Mk 8. 11-13; Mt 16. 1-4. Lk 4. 23

26. Mk 2. 15-17; Lk 19, 1-10; 7. 36 ff

27. Mt 27. 40. See Mt 4. 3 for the words of the temptation, “If you are the son of God...”

28. Jn 7. 2-5 cf Mt 4. 6-7



in the sharpness of his rebukes: 'Get behind me, Satan.' 'Your thinking is out of sorts with God's'. 'You, hyppocrites!' (29) The shadow of temptation kept falling across his path and his path kept branching out as that he found himself at every turn called upon to decide and to choose afresh. He had therefore to keep his messianic vision and his points of reference clear. That is why he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, he got up early before dawn to pray in solitude, and he spent entire nights on hill-tops alone with God (30).

### 5. Zachaeus becomes different

Lk 19. 1—10

The grace that moved Zachaeus was the name of Jesus. He had heard him spoken about and discussed, had heard the words of his friends and his foes, words of admiration as well as of condemnation. So he longed to see him personally. But when Jesus passed through Jericho he was surrounded by so many people that Zachaeus, dwarfish as he was, could scarcely get a glimpse of him. But he just had to see him. Unmindful therefore of whatever prestige he thought his wealth and position as chief of tax-collectors had brought him, he ran ahead of the crowd, and climbed a sycamore tree under which Jesus was to pass. From this point on there is regular dialogue between Jesus and the man. Zachaeus' eagerness, simplicity and inward openness to the mystery of Jesus were met on Jesus' part by a gesture of graciousness and friendship. On coming to the spot Jesus stopped and looked up, and Zachaeus was able to see him face to face. He had his heart's desire. But God gives far more than we ever dare ask or seek. Jesus spoke to Zachaeus and said, "Come down quick, I am going to stay with you today." As these words sounded in his ears, his spirit within him leaped for joy. The man made haste and climbed down and with enthusiasm welcomed Jesus to his home. He could have said in his own measure, "Then I saw the heavens open, then I heard befriending words, and I experienced the joy and gentleness of God's comforting spirit."

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29. Mk 8. 31-33; 10. 13-16; 7. 5-12; Mt 4. 10; 18. 21-23; 19. 13-15; 7. 5-12; 15. 7; Lk 9. 51-56

30. Mk 1. 12-35; Lk 4. 42; 6.12

The conversation that followed as they walked down to the man's house, as his family gathered round Jesus, and as they ate a supper together, is not recorded. But perhaps from the outcome of this visit of Jesus' we can hazard a guess. Jesus spoke about the Father, His mercy and His love, especially His tenderness towards the erring and the despised. He spoke about the dignity that comes to man from that love, making him greater than many sparrows and many sheep and much money; about the meaning of wealth which is brotherhood and friendship; and about freedom and forgiveness and selfless love and service of men in need <sup>(31)</sup>. But what Jesus did and was, mattered even more than what he said. His presence there, the unspeakable quality and fragrance of his person, this direct contact with him, this total personal experience that Zachaeus had of him in the intimacy of his home, their mutual acceptance and communion of hearts are what really matter and constitute prayer.

The genuineness of this prayer-experience is revealed in the change that came over this rich tax-gatherer. His entire outlook on life and his whole system of values underwent a radical transformation. The meaning of existence was seen no longer in terms of amassing as much wealth as possible, as quickly as possible. From the dwarfing effects of such attitudes and practices he now felt himself liberated and growing up to new ideals and new challenges. A straight man now, he stood before Jesus. He would make up, four times over, for every fraud he had practised on men. He had now a new social sense and an awareness of human brotherhood. Of the riches that remained half would go to the support and betterment of the poor. Zachaeus' spiritual experience stemming from contact with Jesus was beginning to flower and bear fruit in the whole of his personal and social life. This, as Jesus pointed out, was an experience and a revelation of the salvation he was bringing into the world. We have in this Lukan narrative a complete story of prayer from seed to flower and fruit.

31. Lk 15; 16. 1-13; 19-31; 12. 13-20; 10. 25-37

## 6. Hands can pray

Mk 5. 24-34 = Lk 8. 40-48

Twelve years of suffering and twelve years of treatment; the result, a deeper sense of humiliation and frustration. It was then she heard of Jesus, of his kindness and his ministry of healing and comforting. From this good news about Jesus there sprang in her heart a new hope as well as a new prayer which was to thrill through her body and become expressed in her hands. She was sure to return healthy and whole if only she went to him. But what was she to say and how was she to pray and draw his attention to her suffering? The blind, the lame and the leper could show their malady and ask for help. She could not. Perhaps that was not necessary, surely not in the case of this Healer God had sent among His people. She joined the crowd, put forth her hand and touched the hem of Jesus' clothes. That hand was her prayer, the pleading of her heart. This trust and this feminine striving were answered by a return touch of power which ran through her frame, renewing and rebuilding her; an experience of the Divine swelling up in the centre of her person and realised in her very body. She could now transcend her fear and make known to the world the new and intimate experience of God she had had from the Body of Jesus of Nazareth. Here is revealed a specific mark and a fundamental characteristic of christian prayer and christian mystical experience. God's love is now given into our hearts and hands in the reality, solidity and warmth of a human Body. In this scene too the prayer-experience comes to culmination in the comforting and the peace of God, that trade-mark of divine events within man: "Daughter, have no fear, be confident, be of good cheer and go in peace."

## 7. A heart is poured out

Lk 7. 36-50

It was another kind of healing that was needed by this woman described as a sinner from the city. But the ultimate experience of prayer, the experience of God, is the same and its medium, once more, is the Body of the Lord Jesus. The experience had its origin, we may guess, in the glad tidings about

Jesus that had reached her, about the new inward reverence for women that he taught <sup>(32)</sup>; about the boundless tenderness with which he received and rebuilt those who had lost self-respect and hope and the vision of a life of dignity and beauty; about his view that publicans and prostitutes stood a better chance of entering God's Realm than did the placid Scribe and the self-righteous Pharisee; and about the uplifting nobility of Jesus and the deep friendship and splendid anger of which he was capable (33). To her this was already an experience of the Divine, and her heart was already seeking him and hastening to him. She needed his Feet at which to lay down, for redemption, a whole life of self-seeking and heartlessness; at which to offer, for fulfilment, a life of loneliness and nameless longings; at which to hold out for acceptance the burden of a penitent love. So she took the final step, endured the jeer and the stare, and came to Jesus reclining at table in the pharisee's house. There what she had to say to him she said with her tears, with her kisses on his feet, with her hair and her perfume. Jesus' response to this humble, touching extravagance of a great soul was silent, whole-hearted acceptance. The communion was perfect. The scene could last for ever. The silence did not need to be broken nor the tears to cease to flow, nor was it necessary that the face should part from the cherished Feet. But the harmony of this silence was actually broken by discordant thoughts in the bosom of Simon the pharisee. Jesus had to restore it by words which, as usual, came to crown prayer-experience with the assurance of pardon and peace.

## 8. She chose to be present

Lk 10. 38 – 41

Mary of Bethany sat at the Feet of Jesus listening to his words while Martha her sister was busy serving. Martha's concern was centred on Jesus and what she did therefore was a sort of prayer, a manner and medium of communion with him. And yet there was something special in Mary's attitude which, on that

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32. Mk 5. 27-30

33. Mk 3. 1-6; Mt 12. 1-6; 9. 13



account, Jesus would underline and maintain. And that something is our personal attention to the word Jesus brings, the word of God which he loved to describe as living and life-giving Bread<sup>(34)</sup>. The Word, more than bread, is an express and exquisite medium of communion. And prayer is a gift of the Word: it is of the Word that prayer is born; it is the Word that calls it forth and awakens it in the heart and brings it up, tending it to maturity. We may say that prayer is nothing other than the Word of God received into our heart, made our own, made incarnate in our longings and our life, and returned to God as our response to what He has said to us. It is because prayer is God's Word become our response that listening to the Word is the ideal context and take-off point of prayer, and that the Scriptures and nature, apprehended as God's self-expression, have always been the seed of prayer throughout the history of religions. In His Word returned to us as ours, in our response, we ourselves return to Him in a free offering of love. This, we think, is what Mary's sitting at the Lord's Feet represents and symbolises. Here therefore was the authentic instinct of prayer, and her choice could not be exchanged for something else. For in the final analysis prayer is friendship with God in Jesus, is this glad awareness of his nearness, this heart-to-heartness and exchange of words and of silences, vehicles of the spirit and of mutual entrusting of selves. Prayer is being present to Him who is always present to us. And we note once more that he has the last word, the decisive, comforting, life-building word.

### 9. She gave her best and gave it whole

Mk 14. 3-9 = Jn. 12.1-8

The fourth Gospel says her name was Mary and suggests that she was the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Already she was a friend and disciple of Jesus, and as such, present to him inwardly. The dynamics of this presence expressed itself once in a telling gesture. As Jesus reclined at table, Mary took an alabaster flask full of pure costly nard weighing quite a pound, and breaking the flask poured the whole contents on his Head (and / or,

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34. Mt 4. 4; Dt 8. 3; Jn 6. 32-34, 48-51

according to the fourth Gospel, on his Feet). And the house was filled with its fragrance. The movement of prayer is complete when the spirit pours itself out in devotion and service on the Head and the Feet of the Lord, when it dedicates itself totally to his person and to those he loves; when it clings to him as closely and peacefully as balm to the body; and when it becomes a perfume hovering about him and his concerns. What Mary broke and poured out on Jesus was her heart full of *Bhakti* (faith-love-surrender-dedication-joy). Even here where prayer had become so silent, intimate and personal, so unspeakably good and beautiful, it needed to be sustained and strengthened by the Lord's word. The word also reveals and presses upon us the practical dimensions of prayer and its need to come to fruition in neighbourly service. Jesus said, "Let her. Count what she did as a service for my burial. And when I am gone offer your services to the poor."

### 10. How did they pray?

Mt 25. 31 - 46

It is not only the thought of service of the poor but also the central place all religions give to prayer that turns our attention to the blessed of the last judgement. The King says to them: "Possess the kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world. For you gave me food and drink, home, clothing and comforting when I lacked these." But the men and women had never met the King hungry or homeless. They had never seen the King at all. Perhaps they had never even heard of him and yet they are now counted worthy of the kingdom. The second Vatican Council says that salvation is available even to those who, God's grace helping, have striven to do good though they have never arrived at any explicit idea of God. Have these people ever prayed, and how? Or do they inherit the kingdom with never a prayer in their soul? But if they prayed, in what did their prayer consist? Jesus said once, "It is not he that says to me 'Lord,' that will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my heavenly Father."<sup>(35)</sup> The same may

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55. Mt 7.21

be said of prayer. It is not every repetition of 'Lord, Lord,' that constitutes prayer, but every surrender of the will to God, every obedient and trustful turning of the heart to the Father, every movement of genuine friendship and love. The Father's will is that we love one another and be at the service of the needy. Those who do this are existentially present to God though they may never have heard of Him. Love is prayer. Service is lived prayer. This is not to say that conscious, explicit Godwardness is worth little; on the contrary, it is an additional value, a greater growth and maturation of the praying man according to God's own best wishes for him. The scene of judgement deepens and complements the idea of prayer which has been shaping through this study.

## 11. Seeking and finding.

Mt 28. 1 – 10, 16 – 20; Jn 20. 1 – 2, 11 – 18

Early on Sunday Mary of Magdala, another Mary, Salome, Johanna and other women go on a visit to the tomb of Jesus to anoint his Body with the spices they have got ready. We are familiar by now with this pilgrimage of man, this search for the Lord and his nearness, this urge to make a personal offering of self, a fragrant outpouring of life at the Lord's feet. The difficulties and doubts that beset this quest for God and for meaningful existence are cleared up by divine intervention, but after we have become concerned about them. Who will remove the stone for us? It is found already removed. But then one becomes aware of strange presences and one is afraid and uncertain. This too can be part of prayer-experience. The mist lifts, in part, and hope begins to shine again when in the precincts of death and the time the voice of the Lord sounds in our ears, and the memory of Jesus is awakened. "Do not be afraid. You seek Jesus crucified. He is risen. Remember he had told you he would rise" (36). The word by which God gives Himself to us not only comforts us in depth but also commissions us. The closer we come to Him in contemplation and union of love the farther he sends us to share with men the vision and comforting He has

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36. Lk 24. 6-8; Mk 16. 6-7

shared with us. The women were to bring to the disciples of Jesus the news of his rising. It is as they go and their new experience of God matures into service of their brothers that they are granted the privilege of apprehending the good news bodily, in the Flesh. Jesus meets them with a word of greeting, and to his Feet they cling, offered up there like a bunch of flowers.

This experience of seeking the Lord in anguish and of finding him in joy is described more dramatically in the fourth Gospel, where an important aspect of this journey and this home-coming is underlined. God is with us and deals with us long before we become aware of it and before He reveals His identity. And when the revelation comes, our distracted minds and tearful eyes may first fail to recognize Him, or may even take Him for somebody else, even when the sorrow and the preoccupation are for Him and are born of love for Him. But then the final meeting and recognition are all the happier, warmer and tenderer. Prayer at that stage would consist in a single call and a simple answer; 'Mary!' 'Rabbuni!' and in the *Nirvāṇa* of clinging to his Feet. But this is a *Nirvāṇa* which flowers into a mission; Mary is to carry the good news to the sorrowing disciples.

The closing scene of Matthew's Gospel presents the same structure of Christian prayer. As Jesus had told them to do, through the women, his disciples journey to Galilee to the hillside where they hope to meet him. And he does come. There are some however, who are not quite sure yet that it is really he, the living Lord. Then Jesus speaks. His are words of reassurance and inward strengthening. He has power in heaven and on earth, He will be with his disciples always, till the close of history. With this comforting goes the commission, the new task of communicating to men the world over their own experience of God and of meaningful existence as they have had it in Jesus who loved, and died for those he loved, and therefore now lives, always for them. The disciples of all times are to be present to him who is always present to them, by fulfilling his charge of loving and sharing what they have come to love and live by.



## 12. Jesus walks along with us.

Lk. 24. 1 - 35

Was the journey of these two disciples from Jerusalem to Emmaus a movement of prayer, a Godward impulse and search for the Lord? It was of course prompted by sorrow. But the sorrow was born of their devotion to the Master who had been captured and killed. Theirs was basically a pilgrimage of love, and their conversation all along centred on Jesus. Thereby they were being present to him who was in their hearts. There was a great deal they should talk and think over in peace. To stay on in Jerusalem was to remain on the scene of the tragedy where all that met eye or ear only awakened memories and deepened the pain. They had little comfort to share. There they could only add to their own and to the other disciples' load of sorrow. Outside the city, in the quiet of a village, they would stand before God and seek to discover the meaning of the experience that had taken hold of them and affected them so profoundly. Their experience of Jesus and his friendship, of his voice and his touch; of simple words that burned into them, disturbing them radically, challenging their spirit and taking charge of their life; of the terrible end, and there was the story the women were telling: what could all this really mean? In Emmaus they hoped to see light by which to make decisions affecting their future. They knew vaguely and not without fear that any decisions they made and any future awaiting them would bear the mark of the Man they had met and loved and were now sorrowing over.

Now Jesus went along with them. He would keep his promise, and since these two were on the way together in his name he would join them and be the companion of their way-faring (37), and with the word of God fan the fire of their love into a mounting flame. With the word he would help grow and come to birth the faith that lay in love's womb. Has it not always been the Christian experience that whenever we have paid attention to God's word and to His unsearchable ways our hearts have grown warm within us and our vision has gained in perspective?

The word of God is always the Bread of life and of living communion with God. During the journey to Emmaus the communion was becoming a community experience as well, binding the two, the three, together.

Even then, even with the Scriptures opening up for us new vistas on God's ways with men, who would have His Christ suffer first and then inherit glory, even with hearts burning within, we may still miss the divine solution to the concrete problem we are wrestling with, and fail to recognize his nearness and presence within our sorrow and our struggle. Much of God's dealing and communing with us take place at deeper levels of our being than the psychological and the conscious. But they are meant ultimately to come to the surface and, like a lotus, open up in the light of growing awareness. In the meantime what really matters, and what brings about the final blossoming, is to love and be concerned about his concerns: about the homeless and the hungry, whom we should press to share with us our shelter and our bread. Then in them and with them will Jesus come in to stay with us and be our table-mate (38).

The two disciples pressed their co-traveller to stay with them. The truth about him dawned upon them when he sat with them at table, took bread and giving thanks broke it and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and the question of their hearts answered, and their search rewarded with the supreme Find. Then there was glad and exultant recognition of the Risen Lord and of life's new possibilities. All this came of their loving search, of his loving companionship and his final act of self gift and sharing of life signified by bread broken and given. We note once more how Christian prayer, even at its high points, is involved with the common material realities of life, with physical contact and the Body of Jesus. We also see once again how Jesus' disciples do not seek to rest in the overflowing joy of their new discovery, but discern in this experience the Spirit urging them to go and share the gift with their comrades back in Jerusalem. Prayer puts man on a mission to his fellowmen.

The passages commented on here are a random sampling. Yet they seem to converge in their testimony as to the shape of prayer. In the sketch that emerges from all of them the following lines may be discerned. Prayer presupposes and begins in a basic spiritual sensitivity, a general orientation, explicit or implicit, of self and life towards God, a fundamental openness to reality and to possibilities beyond one's actual horizon. The heart of this sensitivity is the awareness of being a man with other men, of the demands of this situation, and of the need and privilege of being a man for other men. This foundational attitude becomes a movement and gathers to a head in and around concrete situations, problems, needs and crises of life which call for choice, decision and action. Within these one begins to experience already the touch of God, the stirrings of the Spirit and the pressure of His grace, not always distinct, nor always recognized for what it is. Out of all this are shaped human endeavour, the steps man takes, his quest, agony, expectations and decisions. As the quest progresses there is a growing awareness of the Presence, an experience of Company. God's word becomes clearer, the vision of life simpler, and peace profounder, even while one is still far from dawn and home. What gives assurance is the love of God at one's side, audible in the crowning, comforting Word and tangible in the Body of Jesus. In the end come the final stand man takes before God, the surrender to God's transforming action and the experience of newness. The experience ripens into an active mission to men with whom one is to share the love and truth one has been given.

This, and much more, is prayer.

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# The Bible As Source of the Christian Life

According to Matthew and Luke, our Lord was tempted by Satan through the suggestion of a wrong solution to the problem of hunger. His answer was to take His stand on Holy Scripture, on what "is written": "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." During His public ministry, when He wished to defend Himself and His disciples, and to point out the mistakes of His adversaries, He again had recourse to Holy Scripture (Mt. 12,3; 22, 43). On the Cross when He needed to express His agony in prayer to His Father, He chose a psalm from the Scriptures (Mt 27,46). After His resurrection, when He wanted to reveal His own mystery to the two disciples going to Emmaus, He "interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (Lk 24,27) Later, when He appeared to the Apostles in order to entrust His mission to them, He "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures". He showed them how they were to grasp the meaning both of His own mystery and their mission in the light of the witness of the Scriptures.

Thus the Scriptures were an important source for the Son of God made man. He made a decisive use of them at the crucial moments of His life. He Himself sets us the supreme example of how to live "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God". The will of His Father, expressed in the Scriptures, was necessarily the norm and motive by which He governed His whole life and conduct. What the Spirit of God had revealed to the prophets concerning the Saviour to come was normative for the incarnate Son of God (cf. I Pet. 1, 10 f).

Our Lord's frequent use of the Scriptures gives touching evidence of His true humanity. It shows how fully He identified Himself with His own people, and made their heritage His own. Why did the God-man need the writings of the lesser men who



had gone before Him? But then He was not ashamed to become one of many brethren, to be made like them in every respect, and to enter fully into the religious tradition of His people (cf. Heb. 2, 11 f). Moreover, there is a deeper reason. It was the Spirit of Christ who prayed in the praises and supplications of the psalmists. It could be said, therefore, that the psalms belonged to Jesus Christ more than to their human authors (cf. Rom. 8, 26). The Spirit active in the life and sufferings of the men who heralded the Saviour, had already prepared and transmitted the words that the Saviour would need in His agony on the Cross,—a striking illustration of the solidarity of all men in God.

## 1. The Scriptures and the Early Church

The use of the Scriptures in the life of the Church originated, therefore, in the practice of our Lord Himself. If the Son of God deigned to need the Scriptures in the very conduct of His life, can any of the faithful afford to dispense themselves from the use of them?

In their mission of evangelisation and sanctification the Apostles took the clue from their Master. They leaned heavily on the inspired witness of the Scriptures. The chief part of their preaching consisted in demonstrating from the Scriptures that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were not an isolated or unforeseen accident of history, but its central event which occurred "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2, 23: cf. 3, 18 f; 13, 17 f; 17, 2 f).

From their own experience the Apostles understood that the Hebrew Scriptures had a vital significance not only for the Jews but for all peoples. The mystery of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which had been kept secret for long ages, was at last to be revealed to all nations through the instrumentality of "the prophetic writings" (Rom. 16, 25 f; cf. Acts 8, 27 f). This simply shows that the Scriptures, as the word of God, have a permanent significance. "The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever" (Is 40, 8).

Accordingly the Apostles exhorted the faithful to a diligent use of the Scriptures. They were convinced that "whatever was

written in former days was written for our instruction" (Rom 15,4). It is through the steadfastness and encouragement that God gives us by means of the Scriptures that we are enabled to maintain the hope that marks our Christian life. It is by active reliance on the words of God's grace in the Scriptures that the faithful are saved from errors and built up in Christ so as to obtain their heavenly inheritance (cf. Acts 20, 33).

It is God's plan that what happened to the early people of God should serve as a warning for us Christians. The story of it was written down through God's inspiration for the sake of our instruction. Christians who think that they are secure and can dispense with divine aids, must take heed lest they fall (I Cor. 10, 1 f). Men of God are not fully equipped for their work of Christian witnessing until they have been trained in holiness and made divinely wise through personal acquaintance with the Scriptures. The Scriptures, understood and assimilated in conformity with the true faith, alone can enable the pastors to fulfil worthily their ministry of teaching, guiding, correcting and reproving (cf. II Tim. 3, 14 f).

Hence the Scriptures can be compared to a lamp lit by God, and shining in the dark place of this world. The faithful need this lamp to see their way as they journey on, expecting the Final Day of Christ when He will reveal Himself fully to them as *the* Light of their life (cf. II Pet. 2, 19f).

Our Lord's use of the Scriptures must have been decisive for the practice of the early Church in this matter. But He Himself was the heir of a long tradition of devotion to God's word on the part of the faithful of the Old Testament. Certain Psalms provide us with the clearest evidence of such devotion. According to Psalm 1, the true believer finds his delight in the pondering of God's word in the Scriptures; he will meditate on it day and night. The longest of the Psalms, the 119th, is a fervent celebration of the potency of God's word as experienced in the life of the believer. Those who wish to keep their way pure must guard it according to God's word. He who loves God will love His word and delight in it more than in all riches, in gold or silver. The faithful seeker who is anxious not to wander from

the right path and displease God, will lay up His word in His heart. It will be his true joy, a lamp to his feet, a light to his path. He will be convinced that he can gain life from God only through constant reliance on His revealed word, and that this alone can sustain him in the trials and afflictions of his life.

The second part of Psalm 19 is purely a rejoicing in God's gift of the Scriptures. Because the Scriptures are God's word they enlighten men's eyes, rejoice their hearts, revive those who are languishing, give wisdom and salutary warning, enable people to discern their errors, save them from presumptuous sins and reveal to them their hidden faults. How precious are the rewards of meditation of God's word! Something of the depth and ardour of this devotion can be felt in the following citation: "Oh, how I love Your word of instruction! It is my meditation all the day... it is ever with me... I hold back my feet from every evil way in order to keep Your word" (Ps 119, 97f).

Why does a man need so desperately the lamp of the Scriptures to light up his path and to guide his feet, so that he would be in grave danger of losing his way and perishing if he were without this light? This question obliges us to face the whole problem of the nature of man's situation, as a pilgrim here on earth. The human situation, as envisaged by the Bible, is quite complex. It results from an interplay of God's gracious call to man and man's lack of response. This is the context in which the significance of God's written word must be assessed.

## 2. The God-centredness of Man's Life

The biblical view of man's life is distinctly God-centred. God created men in His own image, blessed them, gave them dominion over all the earth, and invited them to a life of personal communion with Him (cf. Gen. 1-3). It is God who takes the initiative and reveals Himself to men. They are called upon to understand their life as a partnership with God. They are not morally autonomous: in making the decisions of their life, they must depend on God's will. Both the ideas of God's gracious self-revelation and his fundamental demand are finely expressed in His words addressed to Abraham: "I am God Almighty. Live always in My presence and be perfect" (Gen. 17).

Those who pass their lives among the works of God, observe and study them, speculate about them, and appreciate their beauty, power and influence, but who still continue to live in ignorance of God, do not deserve to be wholly excused. The greatness and beauty of created things are calculated, in God's plan, to give us a corresponding idea of the Creator and His love (cf. Wisd. 13). God has not left men without some clue to His reality. He solicits their hearts through the love and care with which He has made the earth as a home for them, and has filled it with good things (cf. Acts 14. 16f). He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our existence (Acts 17, 27f). He keeps watch over our hearts, and fills them with discernment, so that we may learn to recognise Him and proclaim the grandeur of His works (cf. Sir. 17). He has inscribed His life-giving Law on the hearts of all men, so that it is possible for all to obey the truth and to guard against all wrong-doing (cf. Rom. 2 12f).

### 3. Man's Rebelliousness

Such is the mystery of God's gracious self-revelation and self-communication to men. The obverse of this mystery is the fact of man's persistent resistance to God's self-giving. The Bible lays great stress on this fact of the sin of the world. The very first generation of mankind failed to co-operate with God, exiled themselves from Paradise, and did not become His instruments for transmitting the divine life to their descendants. The world became so corrupt and sin held such sway in it that it could be said that all the thoughts and inclinations of men were always evil (Gen. 6. 5f). A psalmist could say: "The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if any act wisely, if any seek out God; but all are disloyal, all are rotten to the core...." (Ps. 14).

Certain emphases, which are characteristic of the biblical view of man, have already become clear. Man is distinct from God, and has his origin in God's loving, free initiative of self-communication. Neither man nor society has any destiny apart from God. Man cannot save himself. To refuse to depend on God is to invite ultimate frustration. Still such refusal is a deeply



tragic reality that pervades our world, and seriously disturbs our life in it. So real is man's freedom that God respects it even when it is used against His will.

A man attains to his true self only through standing in the right relationship of submission to God and through being re-created by God. Only those who have thus been transformed, by the obedience of their life, into God's own image are capable of harmonious relationships among themselves and with the external world. Any success that man achieves apart from God is ephemeral, apparent, illusory (cf. Ps. 49, 7f; 73, 27f). When men are estranged from God, they are cut off from the Source of their true life; they become corrupt in themselves. A corrupt human society breeds violence and must disintegrate. This is the sad story of the dispersion of the children of God.

#### **4. God's Initiative of Redemption**

The significance of the special history of salvation, which begins with the call of Abraham, is that it marks a new initiative of redemption on the part of God. It is directed towards the gathering of the scattered children of God. It was ignorance and rejection of God that led to the dispersion of the human family. They can be re-gathered only through a renewal of their "knowledge" of God, by their entering once again into a living relationship with God.

The Exodus events show how this restoration was worked out by God's action. It is a principle of the history of salvation – a principle based on the solidarity of mankind – that God acts in regard to the whole organism of the human race through representative individuals and groups. It is because God's blessing was to come to us through Adam that his fall had consequences for us.

When God wished to re-gather mankind, He began with the choice of one people. They were to be a priestly people, ministers and instruments of God's work of universal salvation. The work of renewing this people and making them His people God began with the choice of one man: Moses. He was transformed into a new man by his encounter with God in the desert,

by his personal recognition of the God of Abraham as the God who really is: the absolute Lord of Nature and of History. His prophetic ministry was God's instrument for awakening the same living faith among the Israelite people. This people, threatened with extinction in Egypt, were constituted as one people, God's people, through the renewal of their faith in the God of Abraham (cf. Exod. 14, 31).

## 5. The Problem of the People of God

If it is a living faith that constitutes a people as God's people, their continuing to retain their identity presents a problem,— the problem of the maintenance of their living faith. Such a faith is not something static or achieved once for all; it is dynamic and often precarious. It is a commitment to God that needs to be ceaselessly renewed. A people called by God are tested by Him. They can continue to be God's people only on condition of their passing this prolonged test (cf. Deut. 8, 1f).

John the Baptist was aware of this problem when he said to the Jews: "Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father" (Mt 3, 8). St Paul was referring to the same problem when he said: "He is not a real Jew who is one outwardly.... He is a Jew who is one inwardly" (Rom, 2, 28). Our Lord Himself reminded the Jews of this problem: "Jesus said to the Jews, If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did" (Jn 8, 39).

The new people of God, the Christians, are faced with the same problem of a living faith. One result of the neglect of Bible study among Catholics has been that they are not quite aware of this problem. The whole of the Old Testament is preoccupied with it. The study of the Hebrew Scriptures would be highly worth while even if we gained from them nothing more than a personal awareness of this problem of a dynamic and operative faith.

The very idea of the people of God is: "They shall all be taught by God" (Jn. 6, 45). Faith on the part of the

community is their response to God's own action of teaching and forming them. It was to be expected, therefore, that God would provide His people with public means of learning from Him. The prophets were among these means, but they were not a permanent institution. Among the permanent means were the liturgical worship, instituted by God, and the Scriptures, which were a record of God's word addressed to His people. The liturgy, fittingly performed, enabled the people to make personal contact with the God who had intervened in their past history, and similarly the Scriptures admitted them into the presence of God, and enabled them to listen to His life-giving words (cf. Deut. 6, 20f; 31, 9f).

Thus it is in Hebrew history that we meet, for the first time, certain vital elements that still remain integral to the Christian life. We have come across three of them: a) God's creation of a *community* of salvation into which individuals are to be inserted; (b) *liturgy*, as a divinely instituted way of access to God; (c) the *Scriptures* as God's school of instruction. What all this means is best studied through personal acquaintance with the Old Testament Scriptures. This could be the idea of the famous saying: "Spiritually we are all Semites". Probably this again is what our Lord meant when He said: "Salvation is from the Jews" (Jn, 4, 22). The Christian spiritual heritage has its roots deep in Hebrew history.

## 6. The Problem of Interiority and Personalism

This is another lesson we Christians have to learn from Hebrew history and the Hebrew Scriptures. We have seen that God took special means, such as the prophetic ministry, to reveal Himself to His chosen people, and He gave them special divine means, such as their worship and their scriptures, for their growth in the life of faith. What was the outcome of all this? The prophet Isaiah will tell us: "Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against Me . . . they are utterly estranged" (Is. 1. 2f). Passages could be multiplied: see Hosea 11, 1f. A late Hebrew historian, summing up the history of his people, judged their situation as nothing short of desperate: "They kept mocking the messengers of God, despising His words,

and scoffing at His prophets, till the wrath of the Lord rose against His people, till there was no remedy" (II Chron. 36, 16; cf. Acts 7, 51f).

What a lesson this is about authentic religion! No institutions and no external means, however holy, can save man. Neither enthusiasm for external worship nor diligence in the study of the Scriptures is a guarantee of true religion. Jeremiah realised that the holy institutions of the Covenant-community had failed to achieve their purpose on account of man's hardness of heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt..." (17, 9). The people needed the new Covenant by which God would write His law, not upon stone tablets, but upon their hearts. Salvation is only through men repenting and turning to God in their heart of hearts (Jer. 31, 31f). Ezekiel expresses the same truth when he speaks of the time when God will cleanse His people, put a new spirit within them, change their heart of stone into a heart of flesh, and cause them to walk in His ways (Ezek. 36, 25f).

## 7. God's Gift of Salvation in Christ

The spiritual despair of peoples had the salutary effect of making them long for the coming of the Saviour. "The coasts and islands wait for His teaching ... Let the skies above rain down Righteousness... Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down..." (Is. 42; 45; 64). Man attains to wisdom when he realises his own poverty, and wretchedness and blindness and utter inadequacy (cf. Rev. 3, 17f). This is the precious grace of repentance (cf. Job 42, 2f). Through it he is ready to welcome the Saviour and to hear the Gospel which He embodies in Himself. He alone can save us from our sins (cf. Mt. 1, 21; Acts 4, 12). Even the poor Samaritan woman of Sychar had an inkling of this truth: "I know that Messiah is coming; when He comes, He will show us all things" (Jn. 4, 25).

The Saviour draws all men, by the attraction of His Spirit, into the movement of His own life towards the Father. As man it was not by the offering of sacrifices and gifts that He pleased His Father. His filial attitude of self-offering is



expressed in the words of Psalm 40: "Lo, I come... I delight to do Your will, O my God: Your law is within my heart." We truly become children of God when we share this mind and attitude of our Lord, and offer *ourselves* to the Father in union with Him.

Our being called to personal relationship with the Son, the Saviour, is emphasized in the whole of the New Testament. The religious life is not primarily the practice of virtues or the observance of the Commandments; it is essentially the following of Jesus. No one can please God unless he is ready to deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Jesus. No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. Those who are only interested in receiving favours from God, and do not allow themselves to be drawn to the person of God's Son, are not true seekers. No one can achieve true peace of soul unless he learns from the Son of God who is gentle and lowly in heart. He alone can give us true rest and comfort in our labour and sorrow.

This truth which is clear enough in the earliest traditions of the Gospel becomes clearer in the later writings, especially those of John and Paul. Jesus is the Vine, and we are the branches. Our lives cannot be fruitful unless we abide in Him and He abides in us. Without Him we can do nothing. Unless we recognise His voice and follow Him, our true Leader, we are lost. He is the One who offers Himself to us as our way, our truth and our life. To be away from Him who is the Light of the world is to be in darkness. It is because a man's works are evil that he refuses to come to the Light which is Jesus.

For St Paul the Christian is the one who is in Christ. Believers have received Christ Jesus the Lord in their baptism; they must be rooted and built up in Him and established in their life of self-surrender to Him. They have died with Christ in baptism, and been raised up with Christ, so that their life is hid with Christ in God. They must therefore set their minds on these unseen realities, and this vision must be reflected in their life here below.

Authors like Paul and Peter and John speak out of their own intimate sense of personal communion with the risen Lord. Before his conversion Paul had lived a "religious life" which was a matter of human righteousness, of reliance on self. In regard to external religious observances, he was blameless. In zeal for the Law and all the traditions of his fathers, he was second to none. Still what is essential to true religion was missing. He had not personally surrendered himself to God. Consequently he was ignorant of God. He kept resisting the grace of God. He had not yet been saved from his blindness and sinfulness. But then the God who had chosen and called him through His grace was pleased to reveal His Son to him. Thereafter it was no longer he that lived; Christ lived in him. His life was one of entire self-surrender to the Son of God who loved him and gave Himself for him.

Similarly John and Peter had been eyewitnesses of Christ's glory. They had personally realised that the Jesus whom they had seen and heard and touched was the only-begotten Son full of grace and truth, the Word of life who is eternally with the Father. At the same time they were convinced that not only they but all believers were called to the same intimate experience of Jesus Christ. Believers coming later would not see Him with their bodily eyes, but would be given the grace of loving Him, of surrendering themselves to Him and of experiencing unutterable and exalted joy in this life of self-commitment (cf. I Pet. 1, 8). A special blessing belongs to those who thus enter into the mystery of Christ without having seen Him as the first disciples did (cf. Jn. 20, 29).

## 8. Co-operating with the Holy Spirit

It is through the Spirit that the believer comes to this experience of being in Christ. What our Lord did at the completion of His mission was to assure His disciples that He would send them His Spirit who would be within them and would lead them "into *all the truth*". This "truth" is none other than Jesus Christ, the Word of the Father. The Spirit is active in all men leading them to a recognition of the truth of the Son of God who abides in them and in whom they are called upon to abide. "By this we know that we abide in him and He in us, because He has given us of His own Spirit" (I Jn. 4, 13). This statement

sums up admirably the whole idea of the Christian life. It is a life of relationship with the three divine Persons, a life of access to the Father in the Son through the Spirit.

No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12, 13). It is when God grants us the grace "to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3, 16) that we know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, and become rooted and grounded in love, so that Christ truly dwells in our hearts. Those led by the Spirit of God alone are the children of God. They set their minds not on what appeals to sinful human nature but on what the Spirit teaches them to love and choose. Men are called, therefore, to a dynamic openness and attention to the Spirit. It enables them to overcome self, to become aware of Christ and of His saving action in the world, and to identify themselves with it and thus see God in all things and persons and events. Such is the contemplation which alone constitutes the authentic Christian.

It follows that the possibility of the moral life — a life of love and self-sacrifice and service — is only through the Spirit. Only those who rely on the power of the Spirit are enabled to overcome human weakness and to fulfil the just demands of the Law. The inclinations of our fallen human nature are opposed to the goal of life set before us by the Spirit. Reliance on the Spirit is the only adequate means of fighting those disorderly inclinations, of crucifying human nature with its passions and desires (cf. Gal. 5, 16 f.).

The vigour of our spiritual life is proportionate to our existential awareness of the guidance of the Spirit in our daily life. Such awareness and corresponding activity constitute the essence of our life of union with Christ and of devotion to the Father. Such a life is marked with the sacrificial love which was the secret of Christ's life. Only the constant guidance and enlightenment of the Spirit enable us not to conform to the world but to put on the mind of Christ who humbled Himself and became a suffering servant for our sake. Through the Spirit we can make sure what is the will of our heavenly Father in the various situations of our daily life, and what is good and perfect and acceptable in His sight. It is the Spirit therefore who enables

us to present ourselves to the Father as a living and holy sacrifice in union with Christ.

## 9. Worship and Life

Liturgical worship has true meaning only in the context of such a life of devotion to the Father, of union with the sacrifice of Christ, and of fidelity to the Spirit. The Eucharistic celebration must be understood both as the source and the culmination of such a life. It is the highest worship of the Father, — the worship in Spirit and in truth. It is the worship in truth because in it Christ, who is the Truth, is the great worshipper on behalf of all mankind. It is He who gathers the faithful round His Table so that they may listen to His words of eternal life from the Scriptures, be purified and renewed through those words and enter into the communion of His Body and Blood and of His risen life and glory. All this work of renewal and communion in Christ can only be achieved in and through the Holy Spirit. It is He who enables the faithful to recognise the presence of Christ and to penetrate the words of Scripture; it is He who makes Christ present to them through the sacramental rites; it is He who binds the faithful together so that they form one Body in Christ.

If such is the reality of participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice it cannot be confined within the limits of the liturgical celebration. It must find expression in all the areas of the life of the believers. If their assimilation to Christ is a reality, it must be translated into the social virtues of justice, love and mercy (cf. Micah 6, 6f). A worship of God which is divorced from the daily business of life can only be a mockery that God rejects (cf. Is. 1, 11 f; Amos 5, 21 f; Mt. 5, 23).

## 10. Conclusion: The Important Role of the Scriptures

We have seen that Christian life is a worship of the Father in Christ through the Holy Spirit and what this implies concretely for all of a person's varied relationships. If we examine this idea carefully, we can see that the Scriptures have an indispensable role to play in such a life. Our life is a mystery since we are God's workmanship "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2, 10).



What does this existence in Christ mean? How can we realize it? How can it be translated into the concerns of our daily life? This is what the Holy Spirit wants to teach us by His activity within us, within our heart and conscience. Consequently He has a message to transmit to us in all the situations of our life. This message, communicated to us within our heart and conscience, necessarily remains mysterious, inarticulate. Only a great spiritual sensitivity can enable us to decipher it. Far from possessing this sensitivity we are by nature deaf and blind, hard-hearted and stiff-necked.

The crucial question then is this: how can we be trained to sensitivity so that we are able to hear the voice of the Spirit? No human training can suffice. We need to go to God's own school of training. Such precisely is the idea of the Scriptures. They are the appointed place of God's presence where He Himself imparts instruction to the faithful in the things of God. He Himself teaches us to know Him, to understand His love, His plan, to overcome our own sinfulness and poverty, and to respond to Him. As we listen to the records of holy men witnessing to the Word, we receive the same impact of the Word as they did, and we are drawn into the world-wide human fellowship of the Word, which is at the same time the fellowship of the Father and of the Spirit.

Training in God's school of the Scriptures, therefore, gives the faithful the gift of sensitivity to the Spirit. They are made wise unto salvation. They learn how God's thoughts and ways are different from theirs. They understand the foolishness of God which is wiser than men, and the weakness of God which is stronger than men. They realise how God chooses what is foolish and low and despised in the world to shame the wise and strong (I Cor. 1). In short, they penetrate the mystery of the Cross of Christ, of the Resurrection of Christ, and of the fellowship of all men in the Body of Christ and in the Spirit. This prepares them to understand the voice of the Spirit in their daily activity. One who has been so prepared is a man of God in Christ equipped by the Spirit for every good work.

# Towards a more Relevant Spirituality

In the Church today there are two categories of people for whom spirituality has become problematic. The first group consists of those who, with a weak religiousness, confront the contemporary world and find that their religion lacks solid foundation. They tend to give up the practice of religion or persevere in it with an uneasy conscience. The second group is composed of those who, convinced though they are of the importance of Christian faith, feel that the present forms of spirituality are inadequate to respond to the demands of the Gospel in today's world. The existence of both these categories of believers calls for a serious self-examination on the part of the Church. For, the difficulties they encounter in the practice of religion are by no means wholly self-made. We shall, therefore, make an attempt to take a closer look at some of these difficulties and see what demands they make upon the Church in her task of renewing herself.

## I

The religious crisis experienced by the first group we have mentioned, springs fundamentally from a crisis of faith in God himself, although this is not always openly admitted or even explicitly realized. To put it differently, religion and spirituality have become problems for them because God has become problematic. But how did this happen? Certainly, the widespread atheism and secularism of our times played their part in it. However, this alone cannot explain the situation fully. For the very fact that the influence of the milieu could be so devastating shows that the foundation on which their faith in God rested was weak. To realize this we need only to examine the way religion introduces God into the sphere of practical life. Generally speaking, it is through the door of human weakness that religion brings in God. Man needs God because he is weak, because he cannot

solve all his problems in life. Man by himself goes as far as he can; then God picks up where man leaves off. In this perspective the field of God's action widens in proportion to the weakness of man. Religious men in the past, therefore, took great pains to lay bare the weakness of man and to bring in God every time something was inexplicable or unmanageable. As Murray Rogers has said, "Too often the exponents of Christian faith have emphasized with a certain glee, the weakness of man, what he cannot do, areas of human life that he cannot control, points in life where he is at the mercy of forces beyond his understanding, aspects of human existence where he cannot shape the future; too often we have succumbed to the temptation to make Christian faith just a crutch to prop up man's weakness."<sup>(1)</sup> Human weakness, then, was the foundation on which the faith of many Christians rested, and this seemed sufficient as long as man felt that he was helpless and miserable.

But with the rise of modern science and technology, man discovered his strength. He began to gain control over the world and solve, by himself, problems which were thought to be insoluble in the past. The more man advanced in his conquest of nature and his mastery of life, the more God receded into the background. And today, although the conquest still remains incomplete, man feels that it is up to him to complete it. This means that a God who is but a supplement making up for what man lacks has become superfluous in principle. Thus the foundation on which the religiousness of many rested has been shaken violently and a crisis has set in.

What are we, as Christians, to think about this situation? What we see here is plainly the breakdown of a false religiousness, although with it every sense of God and religion seems to be disappearing. Moreover, the historical process which brought about this crisis is an irreversible one. Hence to go back to the type of religion that is breaking down today is both impossible

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1. Murray Rogers, "Worship and Contemporary Asian Man," *Religion and Society*, Vol. XVI, No. 23, June 1969, p. 54.

and undesirable. For a religion which is an affront to human dignity cannot be true religion and a God who is a rival to man is not the true God. The true God is the very source of man's strength and the ground of his being. He is the one 'in whom we live and move and have our being'. (Acts 17: 28) What this situation demands of us as Christians, therefore, is to engage in the hopeless work of restoring the false religiousness which is breaking down, but to rebuild our faith in God on more solid foundations by developing a spirituality which will help the Christian to find God not only in moments of need and failure but also in moments of strength and achievement.

## II

The difficulties which the second group feels regarding spiritual life are of a different order. They spring mainly from the identification of spirituality with religious practices and the consequent separation of spiritual life from life in the world. When religious practices are considered a part of life added to the life in the world and not as its sacramental expression, they degenerate into nothing more than empty rituals and formalities. This not only devitalizes spirituality but also distorts the whole meaning of Christian existence. For, when spirituality is identified with religious practices existing side by side with daily life, life in the world loses all its spiritual significance and Christian existence becomes a curious mixture of secular humanism and empty rituals. It is against this type of religion that committed Christians are today reacting strongly, pleading even for a religionless Christianity. Such a plea may well be an exaggerated reaction against a religion which has become lifeless and Christless. But it brings out clearly the urgent need for a more vital approach to Christian life and this need can hardly be questioned.

Another reason for dissatisfaction with the current approach to spiritual life is its individualism and the consequent disregard of Christian responsibility towards the world. Many believers today, are prone to consider the Christian vocation more as a personal privilege than as a mission to the world. Consequently they prefer individual safety to the risks of committed action. The world which ought to be the dough to be transformed



by the leaven of Christian love is considered a threat to spiritual progress and hence something to be shunned. Hence detachment takes precedence over commitment. Flight rather than fight becomes the strategy in the face of evil, and *tutiorism* the guiding principle of Christian action. But is this attitude Christian? Rather than flee from the evil world should we not fight evil and overcome it? How else can we satisfy the demand which Christ makes upon us, to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the leaven in the dough? Is it possible for us today to fulfil the supreme Christian commandment of love without resolutely setting ourselves to fight evil and injustice wherever they are found? Are we being true Christians when we retire into a region of piety and close our eyes to all that is going on around us as long as it does not become a threat to our own existence? These and similar questions are troubling many Christians today and they feel strongly that a spirituality consisting of individualistic piety which risks nothing for the cause of others is unchristian and hence must be rejected.

Now, if we examine the foundations of traditional spirituality it will become clear to us that the separation between spiritual life and life in the world, and the consequent reduction of spirituality to individualistic piety, are not accidental. They are the inevitable consequences of a theological dualism which underlies traditional spirituality. Generally speaking, theology in the past has shown a marked tendency to emphasize the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, God and the world, history and eschatology. Little effort was made to relate these two spheres and show their inner unity. In anthropology too, the distinction between body and soul received greater attention than the unity between them. In the field of spirituality this divisive tendency found expression in the antithetical concepts of the 'spiritual man' and the 'carnal man'. The spiritual man is concerned with his soul, with the supernatural and with God. The carnal man, on the contrary, is concerned with his body and the natural world. Given this dualism it is evident that man's daily life and his engagement in the affairs of this world cannot have any spiritual significance, as they are nothing but the expression of his concern for the 'flesh'. And when life in the world is thus pushed out of the realm of the spiritual, spirituality cannot but become a matter

of religious activities and exercises of piety, and the consequences we have noted are inevitable.

### III

The foregoing observations show clearly the need for a change in our approach to spiritual life. Traditional spirituality, based as it is on a theological dualism, is incapable of overcoming the dichotomy between religion and life. Nor can it, with its one-sided emphasis on religious practices, proffer much help to the Christian whose faith in God has been shaken under the impact of secularism. This, perhaps, is self-evident. For, it might be imagined that a greater insistence on prayer and worship is the most effective way of bringing man back to God. This could be effective, given the disposition for genuine prayer, most of all, a living faith in God. But this is precisely what is lacking today. In the absence of this foundation, prayer and worship have become largely meaningless for many. They are no longer living experiences. Therefore, the reality of God must first be experienced in life if prayer and worship are to become effective. The road to such a discovery of God is an experience of daily life lived in the spirit of the Gospel. A deeper penetration into that life-experience will reveal that God is there always as its ground and source, supporting and sustaining it. Thus the Christian will be able to realize that God is not an empty word but a reality in life and that He is with him not only in his weakness but also in his strength, not only in prayer, but also in work. Without a lived awareness of this all-pervasive presence of God, prayer and worship cannot become the intense experiences of life which they are meant to be.

There are other reasons too which make this experiential approach to spirituality necessary. Regarding religion and spirituality many people are today haunted by the question: what is the use of it all? When they are told from the pulpit that they are the most important part of life, often their inner self revolts. For what is thus proclaimed is belied by their experience. For many of them, religion and spirituality seem to be the most dispensable part of life, something of little consequence, at least as far as life here on earth is concerned. Now, neither pressure nor arguments can disprove an experience. Only, another experience can do it. Hence

if man is to understand that religion is not useless appendage of life but something that enables him to live in a richer, deeper and more meaningful way, he should experience this. And he can do so only by an evangelical experience, the experience that results when one lives by the Gospel.

This insistence on experience, however, should be properly understood. It is not meant here that religion can simply be reduced to experience. That would be to return to subjectivism. But, if religion cannot be simply subjectivised, it remains equally true that it can neither be totally objectivised. Every living religion issues as a lived experience before it finds expression in concepts and rites. The Old Testament shows how intense a lived experience Yahweh was for the Jews. "It is sufficient in fact", says Besnard, "to look over the history and forms of spirituality to be convinced that it has always been, in the last analysis, the proof and manifestaion of what must be called the Christian experience".<sup>(2)</sup> Therefore without implying any reduction of religion to experience, and quite apart from any 'spiritual pleasure-seeking' we can conceive of Christian spirituality in terms of experience.

Evangelical experience is essentially a community experience. an experience of life lived in common. For, when man truly lives by the Gospel a genuine sharing of life cannot but take place and a community undoubtedly emerges, as is strikingly illustrated by the early Christian community in Jerusalem. In a sharing of life the Christian is given to understand, in a vital manner, what it means to live in Christ; there he discovers, too, the beauty and meaning of human existence. True humanity and true Christianity are discovered together in a community and only there. This means that Christian life can never be lived in isolation. There is nothing Christian, then, about the individualistic piety which so often co-exists with remarkable insensitivity towards the needs of others, although it goes by the name of spirituality. However, when we insist on the communitarian

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2. Besnard, Albert-Marie O. P., "Tendencies of Contemporary Spirituality," *Concilium*, Vol IX No. 1, Nov. 1965, p. 19.

dimension of Christian existence we should bear in mind that a collectivity fenced in by a juridical structure does not make up a community. In a collectivity the person does not exist; for here the individual neither thinks nor decides. His thinking is done for him; decisions are made for him, which he has only to receive passively. Such a life, if it can be called life, is neither Christian nor spiritual. A community exists only where there are persons, unique individuals, who, through an act of personal decision, relate themselves personally to one another and become available to one another. This availability to one's neighbour is truly spiritual life, life with God. God, after all, confronts us in our neighbour.

The need for a communitarian approach to spirituality becomes clearer still when we consider the witness Christians are called upon to bear in this world. As the sacrament of the world, the Church has the mission to manifest in her very being, what mankind is destined to become in Christ, i. e., a community of fellowship with God and with one another. The world should see in her, in a tangible way, the healing and liberation of man accomplished by Christ. As long as this does not happen, Christian preaching is bound to fall on deaf ears. In the absence of such witness, what we proclaim with our lips will be contradicted by what we proclaim through our life. The world of today has little taste for abstract arguments. It needs tangible proofs to believe that Christianity is relevant today. The only proof that can satisfy this demand is the witness of a truly Christian community.

It is the inward dimension of Christian existence that we have been considering so far. The picture of Christian life will be complete only if it is seen also in its relatedness to the world outside. The mutual openness in love which constitutes the Christian community can retain its Christian character only if it issues forth in a common commitment to the world outside. As Christians we are called not to constitute a privileged group in the midst of other men who are less privileged but to be the instruments of that love which God bears for the whole world. Therefore, in virtue of the divine call itself, the Christian community exists for the world and shares 'the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of all men'. This essential orientation to the world



must express itself in committed action on behalf of the world, if the Christian community is to remain true to its call.

This life of commitment to the world is truly spiritual life because in and through it the Christian commits himself to God. God has not retired into a celestial region after having revealed to us certain truths and given us a programme of life. He continues to live and act in history: in the personal history of man and in the collective history of mankind. Through the events of life He confronts us, challenges us, calls us to action. Through our response to these events we respond to God. Christian life, therefore, is a life of continuous dialogue with God, a dialogue which is not primarily one of words but of deeds. "The language with which God speaks to man and man to God", says Besnard, "is not primrily words but rather daily events, those choices that souls are continually called to make because of their very existence and which Incarnation has shown us as not only the life of man, but the life of Christ in man, and yet no less the life of Christ"<sup>(3)</sup>. It is admittedly difficult to decipher this language of God spoken through historical events, and still more difficult to respond to Him through personal choices. But one who, in all earnestness, does not try to decipher it and respond to Him in the language of personal choices, cannot meaningfully talk to God in words.

Once we understand that the world we live in is a world created and redeemed by God, and that this creative and redemptive work is a continuing process in history, and that as Christians we are called upon to participate in that work, we can see that involvement in the world rather than withdrawal is the road to Christian perfection. This also shows that spiritual life is not just a question of religious practices but life in the world lived in response to the call of God that comes through the events of daily life. This, however, does not mean that prayer and contemplation have no place in spiritual life. This is not the same as opting for a religionless Christianity which, sooner or later, is bound to end up by becoming nothing but secular

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3. Besnard, Albert-Marie O. P., Art-cit. p. 7.

humanism. What it implies is the rejection of lifeless religion. Prayer and worship, contemplation and asceticism, still remain important. But prayer is prayer only when it gives voice to the life one lives. It is with life that one prays primarily. Vocal prayer is but the expression of this vital prayer. So, too, it is with life that one worships. Cultic worship is genuine only when it sacramentally embodies this vital worship. Contemplation too remains as important as ever. But contemplation is not withdrawal from the world. On the contrary, it is an entry into the very heart of committed life; it is to be consciously closer to the unfathomable mystery supporting and sustaining it. Since Christian life is always a process of mortifying egoism and deepening charity, the cross of Christ which asceticism seeks to make its own, remains essential to Christian life. But that cross is to be found not in fabricated penances but in the midst of daily life, in the demands that a life of love and commitment makes upon us.

From all that has been said it is clear that the task of making spirituality relevant for today consists not so much in abandoning the values underlying the traditional forms of spiritual life as in bringing them back to their true context from where they have been displaced. The irrelevance and ineffectiveness of traditional spirituality derive from their inherent tendency to create in man a region of piety cut away from the concerns of earthly existence. This tendency has not only devitalized religion, making it a triviality, but has also distorted the very meaning of Christian spiritual values. Today we have to rediscover their true meaning by bringing life into spirituality and spirituality into life, or, to be more exact, by realizing their identity. This is the task contemporary spirituality is trying to accomplish. We shall close with the following lines from Teilhard de Chardin which beautifully express the new meaning traditional spiritual values assume when placed in the context of life in the world today. Says Teilhard: "To adore, formerly, meant preferring God to things by referring them back to Him and sacrificing them for Him. To adore, now, has come to mean pledging oneself, body and soul, to the creative act, by associating oneself with it, so as to bring the world to its fulfilment by effort and research. Loving one's neighbour, formerly, meant not defrauding him, and

binding up his wounds. Charity, from now on, whilst not ceasing to be imbued with compassion, will find its fulfilment in a life given for the common advance. Being pure, formerly, meant, in the main, standing aside and preserving oneself from stain. Chastity, tomorrow, will call above all for a sublimation of the powers of the flesh and of all passion. Being detached, formerly, meant, not concerning oneself with things and only taking from them the least possible. Being detached, now, means, step by step, moving beyond all truth and beauty by the power of the very love that one bears for them. Being resigned, formerly, could signify a passive acceptance of the present condition of the universe. Being resigned, now, will be no longer allowed save to the warrior fainting away in the arms of the angel.” (4)

St Thomas Apost. Seminary  
Kottayam - 10

George Puthumana

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4) As quoted by Pierre Cren O. P., in “The Christian and the World according to Teilhard de Chardin,” *Concilium*, Vol IX No. 2, Nov. 1966, p. 43.

# Basic Trends in Modern Hindu Spirituality

Spirituality is the quality or condition of being spiritual. 'Spiritual' means pertaining to, or concerned with, the spirit. And spirit is the animating or vital principle in man and animals. That spirit is also called the soul. The soul in its essence is considered non-different from God by the Hindus. So spirituality is the state of one who has realized his soul, that is to say, God. This will include the process of attainment and also the being and behaviour of one who has attained God. So spirituality cannot vary according to the passage of time. It will be essentially the same in the present as it was in the past. What may vary is the process and to some extent, the behaviour of the enlightened, the content of experience remaining the same at all times. The approach of the aspirant and the expression of the experienced may vary according to temporal changes. Spirituality is constant, religion is changing

In order to understand the modern trends, we have to trace them to the very source. The source of all Hindu spirituality and religion is the *Vedas* whose age history has not been able to settle yet. The picture we get from the Vedic period is that of a happy people who loved life passionately. They enjoyed the joys of life in a regulated manner and sought after the pleasures of heaven. They performed sacrifices to please the gods in order to procure health, wealth, progeny and a full span of life here on earth and also to go to heaven to enjoy the pleasures there as long as possible. Hence the main religious occupation of the Vedic period was the performance of sacrifices. Sacrifice being an elaborate and complicated ritual, only the initiated could conduct it properly. There should be no dearth of any of the materials used, and no defect in them, no breach of vow on the part of the priests and the patron and no flaw in the performance and repetition of the *mantras*. Thus it became a specialized occupation. Specialization in any field creates monopoly; and monopoly builds up privileges



for itself. The priests became all-powerful. The gods were at their beck and call. By the muttering of the *mantras* the priests could invoke the gods and make them do their bidding. Enjoyment was the end they sought for themselves as well as their patrons.

The philosophers protested and denounced this unholy pursuit of pleasure. The *Upaniṣads* portray the philosopher's position. Perhaps it was the *Kṣatriya* class that led the revolt against the domination of the priests. The *Upaniṣads* considered the sacrifices frail vessels to carry man across the sea of death to immortality. But their's was a cry in the wilderness. The prospect of pleasure here and also in the next world through the performance of sacrifices continued to hold sway over the vast majority of religious folk. Sacrifices involved the slaughter of animals. Then came the Buddha who recognised the folly and futility of trying to ensure heaven for oneself by slaughtering fellow-beings. He preached compassion to all creatures. His followers carried his protest to an extreme, defied the authority of the *Vēdas* and denied the existence of the soul. Buddhism became a serious challenge to the Vedic religion. It propounded a negative view of life and prescribed the monastic way of escape from the ills of life. Renunciation and self-sacrifice were the watch-words of the new monastic religion of Buddha. If in the Vedic way of life the scale of enjoyment was heavily loaded, this was the condition of the other scale, namely the scale of renunciation in this new, rebellious religion. Thus the imbalance continued.

Then came Ācārya Śankara to set right the Vedic tradition. He reinterpreted the Vedic religion. While doing so, he accepted from Buddhism whatever was positive and beneficial in it. Philosophic enquiry and monastic discipline were given their due, and work, as enjoined by the *Vedas*, was accepted as a necessary pre-condition to qualify oneself for the acquisition of spiritual enlightenment.

As long as this revival of Vedic thought by Śri Śankara helped the philosopher to blossom into a prophet, it reigned supreme. But in course of time it became the pastime and preserve of a learned few and fell into the hands of the self-serving

priestly class. It was reduced to dry intellectualism. Then came waves of foreign invasions which forced religion to go into conservative shells of castes and creeds. During the periods of Mugal and British rule the Hindu religion preserved itself in the fastnesses of conservative caste-groups. Political domination by alien races and faiths resulted in cultural and religious incursions. Resistance proving not quite fruitful, the religious current withdrew and remained dormant for a while. The young men educated in the Western way started denouncing Indian ways and thoughts. Then the soul of Hinduism slowly started waking up. Reform and revival movements started taking shape in different parts of the country. The Theosophical Society in Madras, the Ārya Samāj in the Punjab, and the Brahma Samaj in Bengal were such movements. They stemmed the tide of denationalization of the Hindu intelligentsia. The Theosophical Society, preached and propagated by Madam Blavatsky, Col. Olcott and Dr Annie Beasant, though respectful of Indian mysticism, was esoteric and mysterious and also exotic. So it could not send roots deep into Indian soil. The Ārya Samāj founded by Swāmi Dayānanda Saraswati was based on the *Karmakāṇḍa* of the *Vēdas*. It was too ritualistic for general acceptance. The Brahma Samāj, propounded by Rāja Ram Mohan Roy, Maharṣi Dēvēndranatha Tāgore, Keṣābchandra Sen and others, was a synthetic creed, leaning more to Christianity than to any other faith. It could not be considered a genuine Hindu movement. All these reform movements in varying degrees helped the Hindu mind become conscious of itself and also of the necessity of a re-statement, revalidation and reiteration of the Eternal Religion in the changed political and social context. The time was ripe for Indian spiritual ideas to shape themselves for universal application and acclaim. This historical necessity found expression in the twin personalities of Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa and Swāmi Vivēkānanda.

Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa proved the truth and authenticity of religion through his own experiments and immediate experiences. What was only hypothetical for others became factual for him. The validity of spirituality is perennial and its appeal ever new. Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa was in perfect agreement with the Vedic Ṛṣi who sang, 'Truth is one, the sages call it variously.' The author

of the *Gīta* added a rider to the Vedic dictum of the mystic experience of unity in variety by stating that the various paths to truth are all valid and effective if they are followed honestly and earnestly. Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa rediscovered these truths. He is the the proof of *Vedas* in the present day. He said the various religions are only varied paths to the same goal. He also said that one and the same thing, say water, may be termed differently in different languages. His experiences are the contemporary expression of the eternal basic spirituality.

Having affirmed the fundamental truth of the spiritual reality and the mode of attaining it, Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa suggested certain innovations to suit the modern world. The prevailing tendency among the upper strata of society was to deprecate work and to indulge in barren disputations about philosophical propositions. The common man's religion consisted in singing devotional songs, worshipping at temples and occasional observance of fasts and festivals. Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa said in this *kaliyuga*, man being very much dependent on food, the old method of hard penance was not practicable; the path of disinterested work is beset with many pitfalls inasmuch as the subtle snare of love of name and fame is very likely to trap the aspirant unawares. The path of intellectual enquiry was held even in times of yore to be a hard one; more so in the present age of diminishing spirituality and abounding sensuality. The sure and safe way for modern man to practise spirituality is the path of devotion. Its final goal is total surrender to God. This surrender when perfect and complete will be a non-dual, *advaitic*, experience inasmuch as the devotee will then be absorbed into deity. The path of devotion has been enlarged to include all human acts and aspirations. Though the *Gīta* had advocated a way of transforming every act of man into an act of worship by dedicating it to God, it had not been properly applied hitherto. Only some particular types of activity were considered religious and devotional. Śrī Ramakṛṣṇa broke this restraining chain on devotion. The separation of the sacred from the secular was removed. There was nothing, no thought or action of man, that could not be transformed into a sacred duty. Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa revealed this once in an abstracted mood to his disciples. He was telling them about the duties of a religious man. Śrī Caitanya was

quoted on the subject. In Caitanya's opinion the duties of a devotee are repetition of God's name, service to His devotees and compassion for living beings. 'Compassion for living beings,' Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa repeated, and in an introspective mood said: 'Who art thou oh man, to show compassion on beings? Compassion is God's. Thou art only a worm crawling on earth. Thy duty is to serve the Lord in all beings.' These words made a deep impression on one of the hearers. Narēndranath, the future Swāmi Vivēkananda, was among the audience. He was overjoyed to hear this revelation. When he came out of the room he told his friends. "What a strange light I have discovered in those wonderful words of the Master! How wonderfully has he reconciled the ideal of *Bhakti* with the knowledge of the *Vēdānta*, generally interpreted as hard, austere and inimical to human sentiments and emotions! What a grand, natural and sweet synthesis! God is both immanent and transcendent. It is he who has become all diverse creatures, objects of our love, respect or compassion, and yet He is beyond all these. Such realization of Divinity in humanity leaves no room for annoyance. By realizing it a man cannot have any jealousy or pity for any other being. Service of man, knowing him to be the manifestation of God, purifies the heart and in no time, such an aspirant realizes himself as part and parcel of God, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Real devotion is far off until the aspirant realizes the immanence of God. By realizing Him in and through all beings and by serving Him through humanity, the devotee acquires real devotion.' Narēndra also added that, God willing, he would make this grand discovery the common property of humanity at large.

The *Vēdāntic* approach had been, hitherto, a negative one, despising and denying the world. To Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa's spiritualised vision, the apparent world also was a manifestation of God. To one endowed with such a vision, every being is a temple of God and every place a place of pilgrimage. Hence it is the duty of an aspirant to serve the Lord in and through all living beings, and it is a pleasant pastime for one who has realized his true spiritual nature, to serve his own image immanent in one and all. This is the new Gospel. This is applied *Advaita*. It was left to the genius of Swāmi Vivēkānanda to read its deep significance and give it a practical shape.



Renunciation and service are the national ideals of India, said Swami Vivēkananda. He devoted himself to intensifying these ideals in the people. For that purpose he founded the Ramakṛṣṇa Mission. It has a monastic wing consisting only of monks; it has another wing comprising both monks and laymen. The former dedicate themselves fully for the practice of renunciation and service, and the latter practise service and renunciation on a graded scale. The motto of the order is, 'For one's own salvation and for the welfare of the world.' The primary aim is spiritual emancipation, and the service of man is a means to it. The first step is 'work and worship'; the next is 'work as worship' and the third is 'work is worship.' All work becomes an act of worship. Then life becomes spiritual.

The order that Swāmi Vivēkānanda founded puts into practice these twin ideals of renunciation and service. Here service is worship. Man at all levels, physical, mental and spiritual, is ministered to. Hospitals, poor homes, relief operations, etc., serve the physical needs of man. Schools, the publication of books and periodicals, public lectures, etc., help to cultivate the mind of man. Worship, devotional songs, Scripture classes, etc., provide nourishment for the soul of man. This spiritualization of activities, so long considered secular, is the contribution of Swāmi Vivēkānanda. This marks the modern renaissance in India. The same principle was applied by Gandhiji in the political and social fields. Gandhiji felt political freedom was necessary for his spiritual experiments with Truth, and hence he organised the struggle for freedom. For him, fighting for freedom was also a religious act.

Unity in diversity is the age-old Indian tradition in religious matters. The mystic tradition of the Vedic Religion has been continued by Śrī Ramaṇa Maharṣi of Tiruvannamalai and the active aspect by Śrī Narayana Guru of Kerala in recent times. Thus the "Eternal Religion flows" on through various channels.

## BULLETIN:

# A Dialogue on Meditation\*

Douglas Steere, Retired Professor of Philosophy, Haverford College (USA), was one of the inspiring forces behind the Ootacamund Meeting (of which more below) and of similar encounters in Japan. He is a leading figure in the Quaker movement and in the Ecumenical world, a man of great spiritual insight. Unfortunately technical difficulties prevented him from attending this Colloquy inspired by him as a follow-up of several inter-religious meetings taking place in different parts of the world. Raja Ram Sastri, the then Vice-Chancellor of the Kāṣī Vidya Pīṭh, welcomed the idea of the follow-up.

With the collaboration of Raymond Panikkar, then Visiting Professor, Centre for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University, a meeting was arranged as a preparatory forum for those interested in sharing experiential knowledge on the fundamentals of religion. Spirit of dialogue and fellowship was the ideal behind this move. Hence it is a matter of great satisfaction that about 25 people belonging to different Hindu and Christian persuasions took active part in it.

Welcoming the participants R. Panikkar gave some guidelines regarding procedure. No formal paper was read; instead he prepared an atmosphere of personal sharing of experience on the theme proposed for discussion. His introductory remarks may be summarised as follows:-

Today we are increasingly conscious of the need for creating better understanding between religious traditions. To achieve this, mere doctrinal disputes and diplomatic moves may not lead us very far. Deeper levels of religious experience have

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\* Report of an Inter-Faith Meet at Kāṣī Vidya Pīṭh, held in December, 1970.

to be explored. For this we have to step into new strata of 'civilization' and factors of culture. To find out these strata and factors, spirituality and meditation of a certain level may be of paramount importance.

By way of clarifying this terminology R. Panikkar described meditation phenomenologically as that *form of awareness which transcends the knowledge of the senses and of the intellect*. He asked (a) whether there could be such a thing at all, (b) what it is, and (c) how it can constitute a bridge between religious traditions as well as between tradition and modernity.

During his short introduction he formulated among other things the following important questions for discussion:-

1. Does meditation provide a common ground or at least a common perspective for a fruitful human dialogue?
2. Does meditation discover or help to discover a common goal or at least trust in human endeavour?
3. Does it give finally a common ideal of love?

R. Panikkar gave some hints on what he called the rules of translating the insights of meditation into both doctrine and action with practical reference to life. He pointed out further that irrespective of the difference of our religious commitments we are all interested in meditation in one form or another. So our main issues in the dialogue on meditation could be:

1. The place and importance of meditation in each religion; these were to be discovered by means of an exchange of experience among ourselves.
2. The nature of meditation as understood and practised by different people.
3. The significance of meditation for inter-religious dialogue and for modern secular man. This could be the practical side of the whole question and could be called the human encounter in meditation.

To start the exchange of experiences among the participants regarding meditation R. Panikkar requested R. S. Mishra, (Reader, Centre of Advanced Study in Philosophy, Banaras Hindu University (B. H. U.)), to share with the participants his personal impressions of the Ootacamund Colloquy in which he was an active participant. The Ooty Colloquy was held on a similar question in 1967.

### **The Ooty Colloquy on religious experience**

In R. S. Mishra's view the Ooty Colloquy was an actual forum of real communication of religious experience by all the participants. In order that the participants might enjoy a healthy atmosphere of freedom of expression it was decided not to publish anything of the shared personal religious experience of the members. The twenty participants, of whom nine were Hindus, met in an atmosphere of serious intellectual and spiritual interest, said R. S. Mishra.

One of the salient features of the Ooty Colloquy, he remarked, was the fact that irrespective of the doctrinal divergences of the faith of the participants, all of them felt confidence in one another and this gave them more courage to speak out their intimate spiritual experiences which were rather shrouded by individualistic limits of articulateness.

Mishra felt that both in Christianity and in Hinduism there is pursuit of real spiritual engagements. The attempts to dive deep into the interior realm of spiritual reality is not a monopoly of any particular creed. He felt that only such interiorisation makes man more and more free. This deepening is what matters in religion. But it should be a common endeavour irrespective of differences of religious forms. And in a colloquy like this there can be a twofold purpose to achieve:

- a) To understand that religion is not only a way of life but an expression of ontological Truth;
- b) To convince ourselves of the fact that religion is necessary for man not simply from the point of view of its usefulness but also from sociological considerations. In other words, religion is to be viewed as a



unifying factor in society. It also reveals the deeper meaning of man's life individually as well as collectively.

After these encouraging words of Mishra's the participants started discussing the subject of the present colloquy, namely meditation and its significance in inter-religious dialogue.

### **Meditation as negation of conflicts**

To start with, P. Y. Deshpande (Trustee of Krishnamurthy Educational Foundation, Varanasi) touched the first point from the guidelines set out by R. Panikkar, namely the importance of meditation in the context of the modern human situation. He observed that modern societies are overwhelmingly dominated by the achievements of science and technology. They have certainly brought about a good deal of improvement in the living conditions of mankind. But this one-dimensional movement of 'progress', stirring up hopes of a classless and conflictless society, has left mankind with intensified and everwidening conflicts, internal and external.

This factual situation raises the question: Is there a way of life which may help man to understand the human situation in the right way so that internal and external conflicts may be liquidated, or at least minimised, and the doors of perception for creative co-operation opened up for the flowering of the 'human' in man?

Deshpande said, "when I put this question to myself, I see that human consciousness is a matter of conditioning, generating fanatic belief-structures which hold the human mind in bondage. Individuals who revolted against these bondages conjured up other sets of belief-structures, waging wars against those who challenged them. Consequently we have 'my beliefs versus your beliefs', 'my religion versus your religion', 'my ideology versus your ideology' and these unending chain-reactions perpetuate the pattern of conflict-ridden consciousness inventing more and more ingenious techniques of conditioning and brain-washing.

"When I see these conflicts in society, I must walk out of this conflict-perpetuating pattern of consciousness, whatever the risk may be. How may I do so? Of course, by refusing to do anything that may help to deepen this vicious pattern of consciousness, that is to say, by negating everything in my life, within and without, which carries with it any seed of conflict.

"Now the way of life which helps man to *negate* conflict within and without, is a way which comes into being *through meditation*. Herein lies the importance of meditation. Forms of meditation which do not result in negating conflict, within and without, so far as one's own self is concerned, at any rate, cannot, be given that name. Right meditation opens the door for the perception of 'what is' in its existential authenticity, and enables man to function in freedom and creative cooperation. Meditation is the perception of 'what is', within and without, devoid of ideation. Identification with ideation is at the root of all conflicts, and meditation is pure awareness of identity in its *existential authenticity*.

"It is this right meditation that can reveal the truths lying hidden in the words of religious mystics of all traditions, all over the world. This way lies the kingdom of man, flowering up into the 'kingdom of God.'"

Patrick D'Souza, Bishop of Banaras, asked Deshpande whether meditation could be a mere negative mental process; whether it shouldn't aim at something positive outside the field of conflicts, namely something that could counteract the conflicts from without? Deshpande here reiterated his position that man as man has nothing else to aim at except to be more human. He is conditioned by nature, and his nature by conflicts. We have to change this conditioned nature. For this an absolute negation of one's theoretical assumptions which are detrimental to human solidarity, is absolutely necessary. It is both an intellectual and emotional act. It consists of pure perception of the human situation resulting in its purification, and this perceiving is meditation.

To this John of the Pilgrim Church Mission of Banaras raised the objection that meditation should aim at something

positive, as a personal goal to achieve. He supported Bishop Patrick's view.

In this context O. N. Srivastava, Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry, Institute of Medical Science, B. H. U., added that one should not take such a pessimistic view of man's life and movements as Deshpande's. Man's life is worth living, and his progress is meaningful. What we need is not a total negation of his present course of action but a direction to proper goals. For this meditation should be a spiritual discipline of self-correction. Man cannot be put out of this present situation. He is to be understood and directed together with his situation.

D. Bhatt, Professor of Moral Theology, St Joseph's Seminary, Allahabad, held the view that man's outlook cannot simply be reduced to rigid pessimism. His life is always open to amendment if he wills it. Meditation may serve as a means for this amendment.

### **Meditation as yoga: 'mental discipline and ego-experience'**

The participants seemed to have been interested in scrutinizing the nature of meditation further. R. S. Bhattacharya of Sanskrit University, Varanasi, said that meditation could be expressed in terms of yoga. It is a mental act conjoined with emotion. Structurally meditation has two phases: mental discipline, and ego-experience.

The first is the training of mind for concentration. This is mostly done on the empirical plane of the ego. This process may be called '*cittavṛttinirōdha*' (purification of the modalities of the mind). This is a purificatory process of mind, preparing it for proper meditative experience of the self. The second phase is the transcendence of the empirical plane of the ego. This consists in the interiorisation of the mental process in search of the self. Whatever be the form of the discipline one adopts, finally all forms aim at reaching the inner self. This reduction of mental as well as physical faculties to the inner layer of self is the experiential side of the meditation.

Bithika Mukerjee, Research Fellow, Centre of Advanced Study in Philosophy, B. H. U., said that meditation should not be taken as an absolute method of achievement. Just as there is need for training the chemist and purifying the chemicals to get better results in chemical experiments, so, in yoga too, much depends upon the nature of a man and his purpose and how he relates himself to his environment. Man hardly ever understands himself fully. He remains a mystery. Meditation may or may not be instrumental in discovering the mystery of man.

R. C. Das, Acharya, Varanasi, reaffirmed here the view that meditation is primarily a supramental experience. This experience extends itself and takes man along with it to the Supramental Reality, the ultimate point of experiential contacts. And if this transcendence is not achieved in meditation man turns exclusively to the world, and this turning away does more harm than good. So the transcendence of the world by way of an interiorisation of the self while aiming at reaching the Ultimate is fundamental in every religious meditation. In this connection the Acharya felt that religious meditation is the perfect human way of the realisation of the Absolute, and therefore, meditation could never be considered as an elimination of mental conflicts alone as Deshpande had claimed.

Acharya Das continued that 'unity' is the characteristic goal of meditation, if unity is understood as the synthesis of Truth, Goodness and Beauty. This real unity could be achieved by man only by means of a meditative realisation of all the aspects of life. Here meditation is closely related to practical life. He expressed himself as being in agreement with O. N. Srivastava, on the view that meditation should have closer affinity with the daily problems and situations of man.

### **Meditation explores values on a higher plane**

T. R. Anantharaman, Professor and Head of the Department of Metallurgy, B. H. U., strongly supporting Acharya R. C. Das's views said that man has to explore still further the levels of values. Spiritual values should be in the priority list. They have a wider scope of application in human life. He distinguished spiritual values from religious values. The latter according to him have



only a limited scope. One has to transcend one's own religious limitations to realise the width and depth of spiritual values which rise far superior to all religious discriminations, yet are common to all religions. This distinction seems to be very similar to that between science and technology. Science has a wider field than technology because the latter is the mechanical or devisive part of the former which enunciates laws for all branches of technology. Meditation may be described as a technique, just like a religious practice, for exploring and realising the innermost spiritual values of life. Correct reflection is the main task in meditation which in its serene atmosphere makes us more conscious of our own existential values. This is important in each man's life, if one wants to transcend all petty and worldly interests which are selfish in character.

Annakutty Valiamangalam, Research Scholar, Centre of Advanced Study in Philosophy, B. H. U., suggested that everything in the understanding of meditation depends on our definition of human 'self'. If man has an understanding of the true idea of self and its relationship with the self of other people there is a real scope for meditative analysis of the situation and the human problems it involves. The value of meditation consists in our preparedness to mend the broken relationships between the selves of human persons.

### **The Hindu experience of meditation: 'discovery of self'**

Panikkar steered the discussion towards the second point: the experience of meditation according to different religious traditions. K. N. Mishra, Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, B. H. U., explained that meditation in the Hindu tradition is not 'matter-verted' but 'self-verted'. It is an attempt to understand the real meaning of man or '*maṇuṣya*'. *Maṇuṣya* is the fulness of human nature which is rarely realised by all people. A classification of men could be made as follows: According to their different grades of realising the whole of human nature, people are called *jana* (folk), *nara* (human being), *puruṣa* (a person) and *maṇuṣya* (a perfect human individual). Obviously the last grade is the perfect one in which man attains a certain self-consciousness about his full being. Meditation in this connection is a way of experiencing in ourselves the degree of human

perfection. To a greater part it is an introversion which mines the deeper levels of human existence and aims at realising the real nature of self; at discovering the *maṇuṣya* of whom the Mahabharata says: 'I understand that Brahman is a mystery, but let man know that even Brahman is not anything greater than the perfect human person.'

To supplement this idea of meditation according to the Hindu tradition and to clarify the implications of the discovery of self, T. M. Manickam, Research Scholar in Comparative Religion, B. H. U., added the idea of *ātmabōdha*. He explained that the advaitic realisation of self is very closely connected with the deepening of the content *maṇuṣya* by means of meditation. In this the whole pre-occupation of man is to find himself, to become a *jñānī* (a wise man) according to the full content of the self. This process is called *ātmabōdha* (an awareness of the self). One who reaches the climax of *ātmabōdha* possesses supreme knowledge of self, called *ātmāsiddhi* (the charism of the interiority). He is called an *ācārya* (a teacher) who is now in a position to diffuse his *ātmāsiddhi* to his fellowmen. He is venerated as a *guru*, a man of divine experience, and possesses the authority to communicate it to others by the right of his own authenticity, or '*adhikāra*'. This authenticity is not something conferred on him by any external agency or social consensus, but is a charism belonging to him as an aspect of his ontological realisation of the content of self.

On this point Uma M. Vesci, Lecturer, Dept. of Philosophy, Santiniketan, raised an objection that the above said *ātmabōdha* lacks real transcendence of the individual to the Supreme Self - God.

Manickam denied this charge and clarified the point further: The real nature *ātmabōdha* is its spontaneous extension, or outflow to the Supreme Self. In the traditional pre-supposition of the *jagat-jīva ātman* connaturality, this is quite significantly understood. So meditation or *ātmabōdha* here is a dynamic psycho-spiritual activity which starts from the *jīva* in the context of *jagat* and moves towards the realm of *ātman*, which creates in the human being an experience of psychical identity (but not ontological) with the Supreme Self. The realisation is something of an awareness in the *jīva* which possesses the Supreme *Atman* in

itself, with the *Atman* possessing *jīva* in Himself. This is a psychological level of the experience of consciousness in man. This is an *anubhava* of the Supreme Self at the moment of meditation. So meditation is at a time *ātmabōdha* (self realisation) as well as *Brahmabōdha* (realisation of the Supreme Self (Brahman) in one and the same entity *Maṇuṣya*. So there is real transcendence in the act of meditation.

### **The Christian experience of meditation : communion with God**

Bishop Patrick was asked to give a sketch of the Christian idea and experience of meditation. With his characteristic simplicity Bishop Patrick said that meditation in the Christian experience is an *attempted communion* with God in his threefold personal aspect. This is easily understood and attained by an interpersonal dialogue with Christ in whom the Divinity of God is manifested. Therefore through the person of Christ, who is considered in our human language the Son of God, an immediate access to the total Divinity of God is possible. This is the attempt of the soul which in its own course ends in a personal communion with God, the eternal Father of all of us. It is a very simple religious act which is so personal to every devout Christian. As each one feels himself a person, he considers Christ a person in the aspect of the Son of God, and God as a person in the aspect of the Father in relation to the Son, Christ. The interrelation between the Father and the Son (God and his human expression, Christ) is personified as the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love in the trinitarian concept of Godhead.

Man by way of meditation attempts to share this love of the interpersonal relationship of the three persons in the Trinity of One God. He tries to join the 'trinitarian family of God'. So meditation is a trinitarian communion for man. The soul while meditating realises intellectually and emotionally a state of psycho-spiritual illumination in himself, as being in an interpersonal dialogue with the persons of the Trinity. This is a moment of real joy in the soul as the fulfilment of its aspiration in God.

Here Siva Kumar Sastri, a Physican in Varanasi, wanted a clarification. Hearing the explanation of meditation by

Bishop Patrick, he thought that the Christian experience of meditation is the same as the *bhakti* of the Hindu devotees.

Bishop Patrick clarified that it is not exactly the same thing. The intensity and the content of the meditative joy that the Christian experiences at the moment of meditation varies from person to person according to his respective psychological and spiritual disposition toward God. It is in this sense that more than being a mere devotional relationship to God, which is possible to all people in some degree, meditation is the real 'attempt' at an intimate union with God in the most personal way possible to man. Thus meditation could be better spoken of as an 'attempted communion' of the human person with the Divine Person. It is not merely an intellectual reflection on any particular truth as such, though this is not excluded from the total dynamism of meditation. But it is typically a spiritual act of the soul coming from the total personality of its being, as a God-verted movement of the self.

Bettina Baumer, Research Scholar, Dept. of Philosophy, B. H. U., observed that meditation is a real moment of spiritual experience. It is not anything closely and rigidly confined to doctrinal unclarities. Surpassing the differences of doctrines as expounded by the different religions, meditation is a common phenomenon of spiritual encounter with God in a religious context.

R. Panikkar made a good summary of the whole discussion at the end. As a whole the dialogue was a real occasion of inter-religious sharing of ideas on meditation and its practical implications in life. All the participants irrespective of their various religious commitments took active part in it. There were also a few friends from abroad as observers. The presence of people like Mynt Maung, a Research Scholar, International House, B. H. U. was really encouraging. The discussions were very lively and open. Nobody felt inhibited on any point. Of course owing to lack of time we could not exhaustively discuss all the points enumerated in Panikkar's guidelines. However everybody felt and said openly that more colloquies like this on the inter-religious plane should be organized in the future.

T. M. Manickam  
(Secretary to the Dialogue)



# Book Reviews

## **A TIME FOR LOVE** by Eugene C. Kennedy

[Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden city, New York. pp. 168, Price \$ 4. 95]

Odd, isn't it, how modern man, with all his boasting about his successes in the conquest of space and time, is frequently the butt of derisive remarks from some of the world's most famous psychologists. Strange again how, in spite of the unimaginable luxuries he enjoys, these men who are concerned about the total happiness of man consider the typical twentieth-century person the unhappiest the world has ever seen. The paradoxes hint at some problem that lies in the deepest realm of his being. Fr Eugene C. Kennedy has tried with remarkable success to dig out the root cause of the moral diseases modern man seems to suffer from.

The fact remains that the sum total of modern man's gains from the numerous activities he so earnestly plunges into is a most dreadful loneliness and an ever widening gap of estrangement from his fellowman. The zeal with which he pursues some of the fruitless practices subtly calculated to deceive his light-headedness and exploit his helplessness almost reveals the utter confusion inside him. Sad indeed is his plight if what Fr Kennedy says about love as the only thing that gives meaning to life is true, because there is a plentiful lack of it in the life of present-day man. No wonder, then, that people like Malcolm Muggeridge have emerged as the prophets of the doom of modern civilization. The book reechoes the challenge once so thunderously voiced by Christ as he hung on the cross, - challenge to love.

There is propriety in presenting love in the context of everyday life. Fr Kennedy says that love alone can hold life together and bridge the dull days. Some of the best sections in the book occur where he speaks about the need of integrating sex, love and life. The contempt with which he denounces anything that seeks to separate these three reveals a real concern for man's well-being and growth. The Church too comes in for a few hard blows because he accuses her of contributing to the separation of sex and life.

In spite of the long discussion of the need to unify sex and love, one can at once recognize that the love the author has in mind is something that seeks to rise above sexuality. Whether it is within the conclave of married life or outside it, love is the same and makes the same demands. Christ's comparison of the kingdom with the mustard seed is true. The kingdom, love, begins small and humble; it starts with one person or a few persons, and then it grows into a universal love. There is certainly deep perceptiveness behind the insight that it is through lovers that the redemption of the world is carried on. That is why, time and time again, the author mentions that true love is the work of the Spirit.

Fr Kennedy has made it sufficiently clear that to undertake to love is to undertake the most difficult task. Perhaps the profoundest observation the author has made in the book, as it appears to me, seems to be that only two authentic people can enter into a relationship of true love. Frequently, lovers seek identity in each other rather than share each other's identities. Then there is the possibility of lovers hurting each other. Love has two edges: it can hurt as well as heal. Again, lovers have to face the reality that can never share each other fully in this life. The author has beautifully related the sufferings of lovers to the cross of Christ. It is to them that Christ's resurrection offers the greatest hope.

As regards the structure of the book, we can roughly divide it into two sections. In the first, the greater emphasis is on the inevitable place of love in everyday life. In the second part, the author examines the characteristics of true love. Basing himself on St Paul's exposition of love, he treats them in a powerfully penetrating way. The book doubtlessly makes richly satisfying reading with enough matter in it to reflect on for a life-time.

There are obvious similarities of content between the present work and Eric Fromm's famous book *The Power of Love*. But there is a world of difference in the way these two authors treat their subject. Fr Kennedy's book is less theoretical and more intimate and therefore it has a charm of its own.

P. A. Mathew

**CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY** edited by Robert W. Gleason, S. J.

[The Macmillan Company, New York, 1967, pp. 343 Price \$ 6.95]

This is a collection of 21 essays written within the last 20 years. The opening essay is a penetrating analysis of St Paul's teaching on Liberty and Law by scripture-scholar Stanislaus Lyonnet, which serves as a good basis for an exploration of Christian spirituality. The soul of Christian spirituality cannot be any external code of law but is the law of love initiated by the Incarnate Son of God. The next three essays deal, with the three fundamental virtues of Christian life: faith, hope and love of neighbour. John Navonne's essay, 'Reverence for the Individual as an Expression of the Divine Mind and Will' could have immediately followed because it presents the reason for the Christian virtue of love of neighbour. Religious Life is the subject of study of the next six essays. Karl Rahner tackles the problem of poverty in the longest essay of this collection (in fact, it is four essays put together) while Bernard Häring disposes of 'Love and Celibacy' in a mere four and a half pages – the shortest essay in this volume. Religious poverty and chastity have more evident evangelical foundation, not so religious obedience; Karl Rahner applies his theological insights to this question in 'Some Reflections on Obedience'. Obedience of judgement spoken of by St Ignatius of Loyola is taken up for special study by Thomas Dubay. Scripture-scholar John L. Mckkenzie's 'Authority and Power in the New Testament' is a necessary complement to the discussions on obedience. The place and role of the Religious Life in the Church is analysed by Gustave Martelet in 'The Church's Holiness and Religious Life' which has been since then published in book form. Then there are essays on various aspects of Christian life: Prayer, Work, Suffering, Apostolate. The essay, 'Contemplative in Action' is an exposition of the spirituality not only of religious engaged in the active apostolate, but also of every Christian who takes his faith seriously. Man's relationship with the world is analysed by Karl Truhlar with abundant citations from the New Testament and the Fathers. "Authentic Christian relationship with the world," he concludes, "is to be found in the harmonious blending

of two opposed attitudes: viz. use and transformation of the world and at the same time flight from the world". Louis Beirnaert discusses the meaning of childlikeness demanded by the Gospel as a condition for entry into the Kingdom, and argues that it has nothing to do with infantilism but everything to do with Christian adulthood. Two articles deal with the emotional-psychological aspects of the spiritual life. The last essay is a sociological analysis of the present-day crisis in Christendom and so is a pointer to the challenges modern Christian spirituality must face.

The advantage of *Contemporary Spirituality* is this: you have in one handy volume the fruit of modern scholarship in scripture, theology and psychology, applied to the salient aspects of the Christian lay and religious life. The sub-title, 'Current Problems in Religious Life' could be misleading. 'Current Problems in Christian Living' would be a better title. One would wish that the footnotes were given at the bottom of each page for the sake of easy reference; one would also wish that printing mistakes were fewer!

Joseph Thayil



**THE ON-GOING PILGRIMAGE** by William L. Doty

(179 pages; Rs. 27.15; Alba House publication [available at St Paul Int. Book Centre, H-30 Connaught Circus, P. B. 409, N. Delhi - 1] )

A rare sort of book on Christian spirituality, well worth its rather high price. In an age of fast-paced change in Church and theology, it is easy to take shelter within the closed shell of rigid and fundamentalist orthodoxy, or to find a new idol in change itself. The former option leads to fossilized uncreativity and the latter to a chaotic new dogmatism. In *'The On-Going Pilgrimage'*, William L. Doty provides a balanced perspective of the process of change.

The book has three rather uneven parts. The first part gives certain basic insights of the Process philosophy or the philosophy of Becoming, and makes applications that are very helpful to a deeper understanding of the Christian faith in this age of change. Though extreme relativism is inimical to a historical faith, Doty shows clearly that it is an error to develop a sort of fortress mentality about faith and theology where one is constantly on the defensive, trying to present theology as a body or system of changeless and growthless truth, formulated definitively for all time. The author argues convincingly for an anti-static, open-ended approach to theology, which leaves room for ever deeper and newer insights into God's Revelation. We are indeed in the on-going pilgrimage. This, in substance, is the process approach to theology, which has its earliest secular roots in the Greek philosophy of Heraclitus, later modified and clarified by some of the insights of social Darwinism, Hegelian Dialectics, Existentialism and the Cosmic Evolutionism of Teilhard de Chardin.

The Second part of the book is devoted to the problem of spiritual growth. A truly dynamic theology is a means to a dynamic spirituality. And true development in spirituality is hampered if we go against the psychodynamics of mature human growth. Hence Doty discusses how grace builds upon nature. The insights of modern psychology are evaluated in their relationship to the growth and maturity of an authentic

spirituality which can be meaningful to the intelligent man. These chapters are mercifully free from psychological jargon and yet the discussions are sophisticated enough to meet the demands of the intelligent and cultivated mind.

The third section, with the sub-title: PRESENCE (EXISTENTIALITY) is perhaps the weakest part of the book, Not that what the author says here is of little worth – far from it – but because of the rather loose linking of Chapters.

Here is a book I would readily recommend to any friend who is in search of a clear perspective of virile and intelligent spirituality. Indeed, one of the very best books I have read in more than a year!

Dominic George

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Fr George Punchekunnel holds a Doctorate in Theology with specialization in Spirituality. He is known for his retreats and conferences to priests, seminarians and the religious. At present he is engaged in editing a four volume work on Christian Theology in Malayalam for the Language Institute of Kerala.

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Fr Cherian M. Curiyicad, S. J. has been, from 1957, Professor of Scripture at St Mary's College, Kurseong, West Bengal, and is also visiting Professor at St Pius X Seminary, Bombay, St Paul's Seminary, Tiruchirappally, St Thomas Seminary, Vadavathoor, and Kurisumala Ashram. He studied at the Biblical Institute, Rome and in Jerusalem, gaining a Licentiate in 1956, having previously qualified in English Literature. He has published articles in various theological and ascetico-spiritual periodicals, chiefly in *The Clergy Monthly*.

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Fr T. M. Manickam, CMI, after his studies of Philosophy and Theology at Dharmaram College, Bangalore, took a Master's Degree in Indian Philosophy from the University of Bombay. At present he is a student of Comparative Religion in Banaras Hindu University, doing his Ph. D. research on Dharma according to Manu and Moses.



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